

King Alfred's Palace at Wedmore.*

BY REV. SYDENHAM H. H. HERVEY,
Vicar of Wedmore.

THE celebration at Wedmore of the 1000th anniversary of the Peace at Wedmore on August 7th, 1878, the sermons, the addresses, the after-dinner speeches, which were on that day delivered upon Alfred and his connexion with Wedmore, put it into our heads to see whether we could find any vestiges of Alfred's house.

* This communication and the one which follows it were received too late for insertion in the proper place.

That he had a house in the place, and that he there entertained Guthrum and some of the Danish chiefs, are, I believe, facts distinctly stated or implied in the Saxon chronicles.

In the hamlet of Mudgley, about one and a half mile from Wedmore Church, as thou goest towards Glastonbury, on the south slope of the hill that stretches from Theale to Badgworth and Weare, and that overlooks the turf moor, there is a field wherein tradition places the king's house. Another tradition calls it the abbot's house. The two traditions do not necessarily contradict each other. Both may be true. The name of the field is called "Court Garden." The name of the very next field to it, at the foot of the hill, is called "King's Close." Some light might no doubt be thrown on the subject by tracing the property back to its earliest owners. I know nothing of its ownership except that it now belongs to E. U. Vidal, Esq., by whose kind permission we went in with pick and with spade.

The result of our labours consists (1) of those relics which are now to be seen at the Vicarage; (2) of that which is still (May 27) to be seen *in situ*, e. g., walls, etc.

(1). The relics consist of a great quantity of coarse black or brown unglazed pottery, either Romano-British or Saxon; pottery more or less glazed; glazed roof-tiles of various patterns; slate tiles of various degrees of thickness; stone or shingle roof-tiles; iron keys; an arrow-head, spear head and spur; pair of compasses; nails and shapeless bits of iron; horse-shoe and curb-chain; bones of domestic animals; deers' horns, red and fallow; a bit of slate tile with a few bars of sacred music scratched upon it; 2 silver pennies, Edward and Richard (I think the second of each name); some Nuremburg or other medieval tokens. Any impartial person looking at these relics will, I think, come to the conclusion that the field wherein they were found must have been occupied by man from Saxon times up till the 16th or 17th century.

(2). Of that which is still to be seen *in situ* I do not feel able to give a very correct account, but will merely point out roughly

what has been brought to light. On first coming into the field from Wedmore, there is a road made of large stones carefully laid down, though rather rough. Over the road has accumulated about 4 feet of soil, not the debris of a house, but earth which seems as if it had been gradually washed down the hill. We have as yet only followed the road for about 15 yards into the field. I presume it came from Wedmore, and led up to the house. On the left of the road, as you go toward the house with your back to Wedmore, there is a long building 95 feet by 39 feet. It seems to have been all one room, and to have stood by itself, not touching anything else. It may have been a barn, or it may have been the hall. The masonry is very rude and irregular; the walls from 4 to 5 feet thick. A little lower down the field is an underground room, 20 feet by 16 feet, with two steps leading up out of it. Three of the walls are still standing from 4 feet to 7 feet high. The present surface of the ground is 4 feet above the top of that wall which is 7 feet high. One of the walls is nearly 6 feet wide. The one opposite to it, is not so wide, being built up against the rock. These two walls incline towards each other, so that the room must have been arched over. In the debris with which the room was filled up were a quantity of light spongy-looking stones; which I am told are such as were often used for vaulted roofs on account of their comparative lightness. This underground room seems to have been in the middle of a quadrangle, of which three walls and a part of the fourth are to be seen. The north wall of the quadrangle is about 165 feet long, with three little cells built on the inside of it, and other walls running from it towards the underground room. The west wall of the quadrangle is about 120 feet long, and at the lower end of it is a muddle of walls which defy description. Close to the south wall is a well about 20 feet deep, steyned round. Judging from the rubbish that came out of it, I should say it had been filled up within the last 100 years. An old man, who has known the field 70 years, tells me that there is another well somewhere. The road to Meare

and Glastonbury, which at present skirts the west side of the field, and divides it from an orchard, was only made about 60 years ago. The old road used to go round the further side of the orchard, so that the field, where the excavations are, and the orchard are really one. I am told by an old inhabitant that his father told him that, when they made the present road they came across some foundations. So that besides the barn-shaped building and the quadrangle which I have mentioned, the building must have extended across the road to where the orchard is now. Some walls, which we have found running up to the hedge are additional proof that it did so.

The masonry of the different walls will, I think, tell the same tale as the pottery told, viz., the tale of a succession of houses through many centuries. That tale is told : (1) by the different style of masonry, some of it being regular and well-built, some rude and roughly built ; (2) by some of the walls being at such angles to others that they could hardly have been standing at the same time ; (3) by some of the walls being built, not "on old England," as they call it, but on the debris. The stone is all local. Very little freestone has been found. The principal piece is a Perpendicular chimney top.

A plan of the whole thing has been kindly made for me by Mr. J. J. Spencer, architect. Photographs have been taken by Mr. Philipps, photographer, of Wells. I had hoped to be able to keep the excavations open through the summer, if not for ever ; but the necessities of agriculture demand that it shall be speedily filled up. I may add that when we went into the field nothing whatsoever was visible above ground ; nor has anything been, except heaps of stones lying about, in the memory of the oldest inhabitant. Hard by is a lane called "White horse lane." It has occurred to me whether that name may not date from Saxon times, and help to mark a Saxon settlement or palace.
