

The CHAIRMAN then called upon

The Rev. Mr. GOWRING, who read the following paper upon

### Ilminster Church and Grammar School.

In the few observations which I have the honor of making to this meeting, it would seem presumptuous, in the presence of so many persons who are authorities on these subjects, to say anything either about the history of the town or the architecture of the church. But I may perhaps be allowed to lay before you some facts which local facilities have enabled me to glean.

We have had in this town preserved for us parochial records dating at least as far back as the year 1543, and continued, with but few exceptions, to the present time. The records serve, as in many other instances, to throw some light upon the history and manners of our predecessors. There is one custom prevailing in this parish that seems to me very singular, though, I dare say, that there are gentlemen who will be able to point out similar usages in other places. The circumstance to which I allude is the tenure of pews in the parish church. I find that as far back as the year 1553 an aisle was changed for a seat—that the seats were sold, and are described in legal documents as being late in the possession of such a person, as being before our Lady of Pity, or the image of St. Christopher, or as where the Holy Loaf was delivered, or again as being by the Old Stocks. And in the churchwarden's accounts year by year there is a list of pewholders with their respective payments, as well as an allotment of pews, on the occasion of deaths, change of tenants, or owners, &c. Their rents seem to have been applied to the expenses of the church and parish, and in the year

1656 they were first, it would seem, supplemented by a rate. There was another source of revenue which sounds strange to our modern ideas. Archæologists are of course familiar with it. It is the profit made by the churchwardens on the ale they sold at Whitsuntide—their profits vary from 35s. to the comparatively large sum of £6 6s. 8d. Other sources of revenue are the price of land for burial, and one entry, namely, “received of John Wood for ringing of his knell 12d.,” seems to indicate considerable forethought on the part of that doubtless worthy individual.

If the sources of revenue were numerous, so likewise were the disbursements. The windows, and the lead, and the bells of the church, were most formidable items. The windows in the church tower, now happily replaced by perforated Ham-stone, date as far back as 1640. Of the chimes we have a record in the year 1639, and they are mentioned as requiring expenditure. In 1647 the churchwardens expended money on an hour-glass, but 10 years later seemed to think that half that time would suffice, for they bought a half-hour-glass. Again they paid very regularly through all the troublous times for ringing the bells on the 5th of November, and with strict impartiality. In 1639 they rang for the King’s coronation. Later on they rang for a victory attained ‘over against Worcester;’ in 1651, on the day of thanksgiving for the Lord Protector’s deliverance; in 1656, when his order was received touching a proclamation that was read at Cross; in 1658-59, when the Lord Protector Richard was proclaimed; and in 1660, for ringing in his Majesty’s declaration and proclamation; in 1661, for ringing for a plot discovered at Gloucester; in 1666, when the Dutch were routed; and considerably later, in 1716, when the rebels were routed at Preston. In these later days to the sound of the bells

the roll of the more warlike drum was added. Once too they rang on St. George's Day, 1668. Powder and matches are often mentioned. On one occasion 18lbs. were used in the 'days of triumph;' on another for the muster at Crewkerne. Once too in the year after the Restoration, the churchwardens bought a hundred and a half of faggots to make a bonfire. Beer, rather than cider, was then the favourite beverage, for there are three entries of payments for beer at the coronation, whilst the doubtless royalist churchwarden scrupled not to repay himself for loss during the commonwealth, as is seen by the following entry—"For beer, fire, and candle light, which was left unpaid to me when Lieutenant Browne kept guard at my house, 1661-2." Nor was Ilminster exempt from ship-money, for payment is made to one who rode to Wells concerning it. Wanderers of all kinds met with relief. Now it is some Irish, now some soldiers with a pass, now a distressed minister, or a distressed gentleman, and very frequent entries are made for persons who had come from Turkey, once to some who said that they had been slaves in Turkey. One curious entry is that of a salary of 10s. to a man for whipping dogs out of the church. The lower animals suffered more fatal, if not such ignominious treatment. Like the Pretender a price was set upon their heads. Otters, foxes, polecates, hedgehogs, sparrows, grays, woops, jays, woodwalls, fitchets, met with an untimely end. Thus profit could be combined with love of the chase, and the heroes, while they counted not the scalps but the heads of their enemies, could reflect on the service they had rendered their country.

The last entry of disbursements is the last that I shall lay before you, "for writing our book and passing this account, 6s. 8d."

Next in importance to the church is the old Grammar School. It stands on the site of one of the four chantries or rather chantry houses that are known to have existed here ; and it not improbably is the successor to something more than the mere site, for the priests who resided in the chantry houses, besides their ministerial functions, were engaged in instructing children of the town.

It is well known that the Manor of Ilminster was part of the possessions of the Abbey and Convent of Muchelney. The abbots made grants of property to chantries. One lease for the short space of 900 years, and dated 1458, conveys two houses on the north side of the churchyard—the present site of the school—as residences for the chaplains. To this were added Rippe's Mill at Horton in 1528, and Morley's Land at Winterhay in 1530, for their maintenance. At the time of the reformation some 24 persons, among whom we meet with the historic names of Speke, Poulett, and Wadham, were trustees of these leases; and, when, in the first year of Edward the 6th, chantries passed into the possession of the crown, and the crown sold the chantries in this place to Henry Kelway, Esq., of Berry Pomeroy, and Wm. Leonard, of Taunton, these, in their turn, and in order that a school might be founded, sold their interest for £125 to another body of trustees including some of the elder body of trustees. The letters patent, showing the foundation, dated June 3, 3rd Edward 6, 1549, contain an exemplification of two deeds, and then proceed to say that the said Humphrey Walrond, and Henry Greynfield, "tendering the virtuous education of youth in literature and godly learning, whereby the same youth so brought up should better know their duty as well to God as the King's Majesty (note here the almost unconscious statement of the truth by making the sovereign

the representative of the nation) and for divers and other honest and godly considerations did assign all their interest and terms of years in the premises unto the said John Balche (and others before named) from the Michaelmas preceding until the end and term of all the years yet to come in the premises upon such conditions as in the present deed thereafter ensued, namely, first, that the said John Balche, and others 'after Michaelmas, then next, should, by their discretion, or by the discretion of the more part of them, provide and get one honest and discrete person of good behaviour, name, fame, conversation, and condition, to be a schoolmaster, which shall freely instruct, teach, induce, and bring up, as well in all godly learning and knowledge as in other manner of learning, all such children and youth as shall be brought to him to the same intent and purpose, according to the tender wit, and capacities, of such youth and young children as the same schoolmaster from time to time shall think meet and convenient,' and they were to appoint the schoolmaster one tenement, called the Cross House, for his residence."

A yearly meeting was to be held by the trustees on the first Sunday in October, when a bailiff was to be appointed to receive the rents, keep in repair the Cross House, make a yearly account and deliver the moneys remaining to the trustees, who were to put such moneys into a convenient coffer with four locks and four keys, to be bestowed for the discharge of the king's silver, and for the mending and repairing of the highways, bridges, watercourses, and conduits of water, whereby the inhabitants of Ilminster were, or should be, chargeable.

Minutes of all the proceedings of the Trustees have been preserved. The first heading is "The account of the lands purchased for the school in Ilminster." At the end is a

schedule of debts owing by the parish for the purchasing of this land upon this account. The total is £10 19s. One of these debts was to Humphrey Walrond for devising of the assurance. In 1550 a gift of 6s. 8d. by Mr. Walrond is mentioned. The schoolmaster (who has had 25 successors) is first mentioned in 1558 as Sir Robert—"sir" being a title then alike shared by the clergy with knights and kings. The schoolmaster's salary at first was £7 a year. Afterwards it was augmented to £9, then to £40, at which it remained for many years. In 1567 10s. was paid for mending a watercourse, and 5s. for a dictionary. In 1574 Mr. Walrond was paid 14s. for riding to Oxford to get a schoolmaster. In 1776 a writingmaster was paid £4 a year. The trustees seem from the commencement to have managed the affairs with prudence. In 1606 they purchased land at Bridghampton. In 1609 they bought a considerable estate at Swanage for 1000 merks or £666 13s. 4d. Other purchases of land were made in the same century. In 1665 the trustees gave £3 for teaching several poor children to learn English, and in 1709 payments were made for teaching 40 poor children of Ilminster to read, write and to cast up accounts. For the same purpose in 1765, a regular master was appointed. This is still continued; and payments are made to the national school and to a dame's school at Horton. The trustees have continually laid out moneys for the other provisions mentioned in the foundation deeds, and have occasionally built various bridges in the parish. No record of the number of boys at the school was kept till the commencement of the present century, except that in 1761 it is stated in the minute book that there were thirteen boarders and four free boys, and in 1863 eighteen boarders and six free boys. At the present time the number of foundation boys is larger than has ever been known.

Besides the Church and the School there is but little, I fear, in this town of antiquarian interest. One place bears the suggestive and warlike name of Behind Butts, and another the more peaceful title of Strawberry Bank. Several houses with the quaint gable ends may still be seen, and in one house, which is an old chantry house on the west side of the churchyard, there are still the remains, I suppose, of a credence table and the pedestal of a statue; and before the alterations made in it some few years since, there were immediately behind the fire place in the kitchen, and in the room above it two small chambers adapted for concealment.

There is also attached to the house that favourite tradition of a secret underground passage. We might have had more objects of interest to show had it not been for a great fire in 1738, when despite the "Ingions," which the parish records tell us were paid for in 1722, and despite the presence of a whirlgog in 1724, so much of the town was destroyed that thirteen persons were excused their rates.

MR. JOHN BATTEN, then read a paper "On the Wadham Family."

MR. CHARLES MOORE, F.G.S., then read a paper "On the Middle and Upper Lias of the South West of England," published in Part II.