EXCURSION TO CIRENCESTER.

The following condensed Report of the Society's Excursion to Cirencester, on June 3rd, 1880, will be of interest both to those who were and to those who were not present on that occasion. It must, however, be clearly understood to be no more than a fairly accurate abridgment of the remarks made by the various speakers taken at the time by the Reporter present, and it is NOT a verbatim Report prepared by the speakers themselves.

ON arriving at Cirencester the party at once proceeded to the Museum of Roman Antiquities, which have been found in the town and neighbourhood. Here they were met by Mr. C. Bowly, who had kindly undertaken to describe to the Society the Roman antiquities of the district.

All being assembled, Mr. Bowly said he had thought that before starting upon their tour of inspection the visitors might like some short résumé of the history of that most ancient place. He proceeded as follows:—I said "most ancient" place, because I shall in the afternoon point out to you one of those long barrows which are the earliest sepulchral evidence of the existence of man in Britain. Metals appear to have been unknown to the man of that period, for in his grave we only find stone and bone implements; he was usually short of stature, about five-ft. six inches, and the women four-ft. eight or ten inches; his skull was long and narrow. He buried towards the east, probably because he was a worshipper of the Sun, but did not practise cremation; and it is supposed from this fact, and also the paucity of hatchets and axes, that he led a generally peaceful life. But he was driven out by a taller and more powerful race, who buried in round barrows, one of which is to be seen within about a mile from here. These men understood the use of metals, and they frequently practised cremation, the ashes being sometimes placed in urns. Before leaving the subject of barrows, I should mention that the remains of a mound which is supposed to be one of the early long barrows, is near to where we stand, and was many years ago turned into an icehouse. Report said that when it was dug out, one large skeleton was found, and also urns containing ashes. I suspect that the large skeleton was a stretch of the imagination, and was simply the primary interment, while the urns were the secondary interments.

Passing to the period of the Roman occupation, I may remark that the Romans took possession of Cirencester in the year 43. In

that year Claudius Cæsar ordered four legions over to Britain, under Aulus Plautius, and two of these under Vespasian, afterwards Emperor, proceeded to the Isle of Wight, and from thence to the main land, *via* Wareham to the Cotswolds. Here they came to Caer Kerri, or Kerrin, so called from the River Kerrin (now known as the Churn), the British predecessor of Cirencester, and the capital of the Boduni or Hillsmen. This is the first city recorded by name that yielded to Roman arms. Having left a garrison here, Vespasian went on until he came to a large river, no doubt the Severn, and saw the Britons encamped on the other side. Having in his army a number of North Germans, excellent swimmers, they swam the river with their arms, and dispersed the Britons. Vespasian built a garrison at Gloucester, and another at the same time was formed at Colchester, and this established a horizontal line across the kingdom which was the boundary of Britannia Prima. The first thing the Romans probably did after their victory was to lay down tesselated pavement, and this they did on the same principal as that on which victorious armies in these days unfurl the national banner. Indeed, it is said of Cæsar that he took about tesseræ with him in his baggage for that purpose. They next built walls round the city, eight feet thick, inclosing a space of two hundred and forty acres, in the shape of a parallelogram rounded at the sides, and they diverted the stream (the Churn) to form a moat round the walls. These walls had towers placed on them, and Leland says, "A man walking on the banks of the Churn may yet perceive the compace of foundations of towers sometime standing in the wall." Stukeley, in 1723, was able to trace the walls round, and they had formed for centuries quarries for the town. During the drainage works now in progress, the city wall has been uncovered in several places, but as Cirencester has been considerably raised, these remains of the wall are now some distance below the surface. Within the city walls have been found for generations an enormous amount of Roman remains, the larger quantity of which I regret to say have been lost and destroyed, and another large portion taken away, and what we have now to show visitors is but a remnant of what has been discovered. These have been kept together through the liberality of a former Earl Bathurst, uncle to the present Earl, who at his own expense erected this museum and conveyed hither the pavements now before you. The remains are sometimes found at a depth of eight feet, and are occasionally those of buildings of a character which showed Cirencester to have been a city of great magnificence and importance. Two Roman capitals, which I shall presently show you in the abbey grounds belonging to Mr. Master, will give you an idea of the splendour of some of the buildings that formerly existed here. Five Roman roads ran through Cirencester, and one of them you have just passed over, Ackman street, was the highway along which invalids journeyed to seek cure by aid of the waters at Bath. In 426 the Romans finally quitted Britain, and in 443, Constantine, brother of Aldroenus, King of Brittany, was brought over by Archbishop Guiteline, and crowned here, and this circumstance has led to the confusion as to Constantine

the Great having been crowned at Cirencester. In 577, the West Saxons having defeated and slain three British kings near Chipping Sodbury, took possession of Cirencester, and made it a frontier garrison town against the kingdom of Mercia. In 628, Penda, king of Mercia, ambitious to be chief of the Heptarchy, in conjunction with the King of North Wales, gave battle here to the King of Wessex, who had assembled a large army to oppose him. The fight was a long and bloody one, and night alone separated the combatants. In the morning, both sides were so aghast at the sight of the frightful carnage that, neither having gained any particular advantage, peace was made, and the West Saxons remained in possession. However, in 656 they were driven out by Paeda, the first Christian king of Mercia. In 876 a name occurred which has left its mark on the town seal of Cirencester to the present time. In that year Gothrum, the Dane, was defeated by Alfred at Ethendune, and in the rough and ready way in which proselytes were converted in those days, he made peace on the condition of his being baptised, with thirty of his followers, and remained here for twelve months. Tradition says, though fabulously as is averred, that Gurmund, an African tyrant, besieged Cirencester for seven years, and finally took the city by the strategy of tying combustibles to sparrows' tails, that these flew upon the thatch roofs, and thus set fire to the town, which was taken in the consequent confusion. This was the reason that the sparrow now appeared on the Cirencester town seal. Sir Robert Atkyns said that Gothrum beseiged the town for a year, and Camden mentioned that a mound, said to be the remains of Gurmund's tower, was shown by the townspeople.

Although the generally accepted opinion is in favour of the account first mentioned, that of the baptism, yet it seems strange that the tradition as to the siege should have been handed down almost to the present day if there was no foundation for it. The next circumstance to be noticed is that in 1020 Canute held a great council in Cirencester, when Duke Æthelward was outlawed. Passing on I may remark that on the death of Henry I., the Earl of Gloucester garrisoned the castle at Cirencester for the Empress Maude, but was surprised and defeated by Stephen, and the castle was burnt down. It was very shortly afterwards repaired, but being again garrisoned by the Barons who took up arms against Henry III., they were defeated, and in pursuance of Royal warrant the castle was entirely destroyed. The castle is still held in remembrance by the name of Castle Street, which is supposed to have led to it. In 1215, John assembled an army here to oppose his Barons, with the final result of which all are well acquainted. In the reign of Henry IV., the plot of the Dukes of Surrey and Exeter, and the Earls of Salisbury and Gloucester, to seize the king whilst at a tournament at Oxford, having been discovered, and the king having raised an army to oppose them, they retreated to Cirencester, and encamped without the walls, which were then standing. The chiefs took up their quarters at separate inns, and taking but few retainers with them, and also neglecting to place

the proper sentinels, the mayor assembled a body of the inhabitants during the night, closed the city gates, and attacked the conspirators. The Duke of Exeter and the Earl of Oxford escaped by the house tops, but the Duke of Surrey and the Earl of Salisbury took sanctuary in the abbey. However, says Hollingshed, "They (the townspeople) brought them forthe of the abbey, where they had them in their hands, and in the twilight of the evening smote off their heads." These were sent to London, and the conspirators outside having fired the town, dispersed. Another report was that the retainers within the town set fire to it with the hope of distracting the attention of the citizens, and that those outside, supposing that the king had arrived, and attributing the conflagration to the royal troops, fled. His Majesty was so gratified at the conduct of the townspeople of Cirencester on that occasion that he granted unto them all the spoil of the conspirators, except the gold and silver ornaments, money, and jewels. In addition he granted unto the men of Cirencester, from his forest of Braydon, about eight or ten miles distant, four does in season, and a hogshead of wine from his port of Bristol; and to the women of Cirencester six bucks in season and a hogshead of wine.

The barrow to which I had called your attention somewhat earlier, the one now used as Earl Bathurst's ice-house, figured rather conspicuously in the battle of 1642, where it was mentioned as Poole's Mound, the property then belonging to the Poole family. But it does not come within my province this day to point out the position of the combatants, to follow the fortunes of the fray, to show where Rupert charged or Roundhead fell. Suffice it to say that most of the ground we shall travel over this day had been fought over by Royalist and Parliamentarian. The last sanguinary struggle witnessed in Cirencester was in 1688, when an attempt was made to stop Lord Lovelace from marching to meet the Prince of Orange. Since then the people of Cirencester had no fiercer contests than parliamentary elections, or competitions for seats on the Local or School Boards. Indeed so thoroughly have they beaten their swords into plough shares that the latest achievement has been to build an Agricultural College, where many who had once followed the profession of arms come to learn the peaceable pursuits of agriculture.

Mr. Bowly having concluded his interesting review of the ancient history of the town, explained and described the Roman pavement and other objects of interest with which the museum is filled.

The greater part of the floor is occupied by two fine mosaic pavements, which were discovered in one of the streets of the town in 1849, and in cases ranged round the building are remains of the Bronze and Iron ages, Samian ware, sepulchral urns, inscribed tiles, coins, Castor, Upchurch, and New Forest pottery, specimens of ancient work in glass, bone, and jet, and large vessels of pottery.

Arranged on shelves are monuments, querns, and architectural fragments, and on the floor are coffins, altars, and pillars. One of the pavements in the museum, when entire, was composed of nine circles, ranged three and three, in a square, and of these five remain entire, or nearly so, and two are partially visible, but the others, with a considerable portion of the outer bordering, had been destroyed in making the foundations of a house near to where the pavement was discovered. The corner circles contain female heads, representing Flora, Ceres, and Pomona, emblematical of Spring, Summer, and Autumn. The fourth, which is conjectured to have been representative of winter, could not be excavated. Between Ceres and Pomona is delineated the story of Acteon attacked by his dogs; another compartment is occupied by Silenus, on an ass; and on the opposite side was Bacchus and the panther, but of this the greater portion is gone. The middle circles were in a great measure destroyed when the pavement was found. Of the subject represented, only the fore legs of a horse can be distinguished, but it is assumed that the figure was that of a Centaur, and probably there was a group, representing a combat between a Centaur and a Lapithite. The intervals between the circles are formed into diamond shaped compartments, and of these two remain, one containing a head of a Gorgon, and the other a female figure, perhaps a Bacchante. The several medallions are enclosed by borders of the guilloche pattern, and the whole is surrounded by a broad margin of varied design, in which the laburthine fret is conspicuous. There are coins in the museum of nearly every reign, from Tiberius to Honorius, and numerous coins of different reigns have been discovered in the town during the course of excavations.

Leaving the museum by the entrance leading into Earl Bathurst's private grounds, the party proceeded along the beautiful walks in front of the mansion to the broad ride, near to the entrance from the town into the park, and on to the Barton, to view the tesselated pavement there situated. This pavement was discovered about fifty years ago, and is the more interesting because it remains *in situ*, the late Earl Bathurst having caused a suitable building to be erected over it immediately after it was discovered. The outer edge of the pavement consists of a wide border of mosaic pattern, formed of stones and coloured brick, in which yellow and green are the predominant colours. Inside are two borders; on the outer one are interlaced elliptical rings, of red brick, shadowed with dark brown and somewhat heightened by white; the inner one, of the same pattern as the outer, forms the extremity of the central device. This central device consists of three circles, the two outer separated by rows of green laurel leaves, arranged three deep upon a dark ground. In the first and widest circle are the representations of various animals, in the act of following each other round the circle, stunted trees being introduced in the spaces between the animals. In the next circle are pictures of various birds, with shrubs put in to fill up the pattern. In the central compartment is a large figure representing Orpheus playing on his lyre, with an animal, supposed to be his dog, partly obliterated, at his feet.

Orpheus is sitting in an easy attitude, with the harp resting on one knee. Remains of other borders are to be seen at each end of the pavement.

Returning to Cecily Hill, the party were met by the Rev. E. A. Fuller, Vicar of St. Barnabas, Bristol. *En route* for the Abbey Gate-way in the Grove Lane, Mr. Fuller informed the visitors that the road now known as Cecily Hill was formerly called Inchthrop Street, and was the only entrance to the town beside the four great main roads. The site of the chapel of St. Cecilia, and the course of the Roman wall, were pointed out, and standing on the bridge at the bottom of the hill, the ancient name of the bridge was alluded to. The signification of the old title as "the bridge of the ducking stool brook" was humourously referred to, the ladies being reminded of the effectual remedy which the suitors at the Court Leet found for the female scolds of former days. Other objects of interest were particularised,—Monmouth House, now occupied as the Rifle Corps Armoury; the remaining signs of the former extensive trade in wool done here; the Hospital of St. Thomas, founded by Sir William Nottingham, and the consequent alteration of the name of the street from Battle Street to Thomas Street. The corruption of Dole Hall Street (as connected with the abbey) into Dollar Street. The remains of the old chapel of St. John of Jerusalem, founded by Henry I., about 1130, and now known by the incomprehensible name of the Paen—all these were interestingly touched on by Mr. Fuller. The old gate-way in Grove Lane being reached, Mr. Fuller mounted the wall of the bridge, and gave a brief description of it. He said it was the only relic left of the ancient Abbey of Cirencester. As to the date of the abbey, he observed that the College of Canons was said to have existed from about the year 800, having been founded by one Alwyn, in the reign of Egbert. There were no deeds specifying this that he could find, but an old chronicle of the abbey seemed to have been in existence a hundred years ago, establishing this fact. At any rate, Collinson, the historian of Somersetshire, in a note under the parish of Frome, which belonged to this abbey, said he had such a MS. in his possession. It was also clear that this date was correct from the fact that the monks in enrolling in their chartulary the charter which turned it into a regular abbey of Augustinian canons, in the reign of Henry I., stated in a marginal note that the monastery had already been established 300 years. The abbey was begun building in 1117, but the church was not consecrated until 1176, and it appeared from William of Worcester's description in 1460, that the ancient church of the College of Canons was still allowed to stand as a chapel. The old buildings comprised in the precincts the space from Dollar Street to the Grove Lane, or from Dole Hall Gate to the Spital Gate (the one now under notice), the buildings of the abbey having occupied pretty much the site of the present abbey house. The reverend gentleman gave his reasons for this belief, among others being that during an excavation for the purpose of improvement of the house some years ago, Mr. Master found large pieces of a handsome groined roof, which was no doubt a

portion of the roof of a side chapel or cloister of the abbey. A part of the same roof had been fixed in St. Catherine's Chapel in the parish church, and this had no doubt been saved from the destruction of the abbey. The gateway before them he took to be 12th century work.

Mr. Fuller then surrendered his charge to Mr. Bowly, who pointed out portions of the Roman wall to be seen along Grove Lane, and called attention to two handsome Roman capitals in the abbey grounds as evidences of the magnificence of the Roman city.

The party now separated for luncheon, meeting again at 2.15 p.m. at the Parish Church, where they were met by the Rev. Mr. Fuller, who again kindly acted as cicerone to the party, and gave a description of the ancient edifice.

Cirencester once boasted of two churches, one on Cecily Hill, as above alluded to; and the other, the existing church, dedicated to St. John Baptist. Of the first-named no trace remains. The present church is considered one of the finest parochial churches in the kingdom. There is no evidence in written records as to when it was first erected, but the architecture and certain heraldic indications, together with some wills of the 15th and 16th centuries, with the deeds connected with one of the chantry chapels, point to a gradual growth from Early Norman to Late Perpendicular styles, almost up to the time of the Reformation, the chancel arcades being of the 12th century, the nave of the 16th century. The church consists of a nave, chancel, two aisles, and four chapels, respectively dedicated to the Trinity, St. Mary, St. Catherine, and St. John Baptist. At the west end is a tower, built about 1400, and on the south side the church is entered by a porch, above which is the Town Hall. The porch and hall stand out very prominently. The building—for the porch and hall form essentially one building—is a fine specimen of Gothic architecture, and was erected in the early part of the reign of Henry VIII., by a subscription of the parishioners. The porch is considered a magnificent piece of Gothic workmanship. It is internally adorned with a chaste and beautiful kind of tracery, which spreads over the roof in eight fan-shaped compartments, rising from single pillars. On a moulding above the entrance to the porch are some very grotesque figures, and each compartment above contains an oriel window, ascending to the cornice below the battlements, the cornice itself being ornamented with various figures. The north porch was formerly partially hidden by houses, but at the restoration of the church some years ago these houses were removed. The tower is said to be a fine example of the slender ornate type Perpendicular tower, common in the south-west of England. The tower is 134 feet in height, and in ornamental niches at two angles of the tower are statues of St. John Baptist and an Abbot. The interior of the church is as interesting as the exterior. The roof is supported by a double row of five clustered columns. At the spring of the arches cherubic figures, bearing escutcheons on which are the

arms of those persons by whose liberality the nave was mainly re-built early in the 16th century. Amongst them are the arms of Thomas Rowthall, Bishop of Durham, who was a native of the town. It was chiefly owing to Rowthall's exertions that the south porch and Town Hall were built, but according to Leland, he did not give anything towards the restoration of the nave, for that historian says:—"The body of the Chich is al new worke, to which Ruthall, Bishop of Durham, borne and brought up yn Cirecester, promised much, but preventid with deth gave nothing." Over the arcade of the nave is a clerestory. The various painted windows having got sadly mutilated, the glass was in 1790 carefully gathered up and arranged in the west window. A bold arch spans the eastern wall of the nave communicating with the chancel: the organ loft formerly occupied this recess, but it has been removed, thus throwing open the chancel, with its beautiful window. Trinity Chapel, which has two entrances, is divided from the north aisle by a Gothic screen. At the east end are the old altar steps. On the north wall is a painting of St. Erasmus in a recumbent posture, and beneath it is an inscription in the orthography of the 15th century, which is thus translated:—"Whatever man or woman shall worship this holy Saint, Bishop, and Martyr, every Sunday in the year, with a paternoster or an ave, or giveth any alms to a poor man, or shall bring any candles to light less or more, he shall have five gifts granted him of God. First, he shall have reasonable good to his life's end. Second, that his enemies shall have no power to do him bodily harm or disease. Third, that whatever reasonable thing he shall ask of God and his holy Saint, shall be granted to him. Fourth, that he shall be unburthened of all tribulation and disease. Fifth. that at his last end, he shall have confession, and the eucharist, and great repentance, and extreme unction; so that he may come to that bliss which never hath end. Amen." St. Mary's Chapel also has the steps which led to the altar, and a niche and projection on the wall mark the place where the piscina once stood. In one of the corners is a wooden screen, formerly the parclose of a chantry chapel in the south aisle of the nave; a beautiful specimen of wood carving. The chapel also contains a tablet to the memory of Samuel Rudder (a county historian), his wife, and three of his children, all of whom were buried in the adjoining churchyard. In St. Catherine's Chapel is a fresco painting of the martyrdom of St. Catherine. The beautifully pendant roof of fan tracery was added after the suppression of the abbey, being brought from thence. The central compartments are ornamented with sculptural foliage and Tudor roses, and the arms of Henry VII., within the garter, are finely emblazoned. The chapel dedicated to St. John requires little notice. The old carved stone pulpit is of open Gothic work, and has frequently served as an illustration in works on Gothic architecture. The colour about it was discovered some years ago in scraping off the lime-wash. The reredos consists of three large panels, the subjects being the Crucifixion, the Agony in the Garden, and the Resurrection; and the four niches contain figures of the four evangelists. There are a number of

memorial brasses in the church, three of which are engraved in one of the late Canon Lysons' work. The earliest is dated 1438, and is a figure of an esquire in complete plate armour. The heraldic shields are also worth inspection. The belfry contains a peal of twelve bells, and is said to be the second peal of that number hung in England. The peal was cast by Rudhall, of Gloucester. The church was restored in 1865-6-7, at a cost of about £13,000.

The company next drove to the Roman wall, which lies on the south-east of the town, about one mile from the church. Cirencester is supposed to have been the site of a British camp before the invasion of the Romans, and on their occupation of the country it became, under the name of Corinium, not only a military station, but the capital of the surrounding district. Four great consular ways, after the lapse of fifteen centuries, are still used as highways of the district. The course of a wall, supposed to be a Roman work, is still distinguishable at intervals encircling the town. The line of the wall, unlike the Roman plan of squares, is of an irregular shape, and has a circuit of a little more than two miles, and it is conjectured that this irregularity is owing to the Romans having adopted a line of fortification made by the former occupiers of the town. There are only a few remnants of the masonry of the wall, but the line can be traced for someting like half its circuit by the earth bank upon which it is built. At the southern side of the rampart appears to have been the cemetery, monumental stones and urns having been frequently dug up there. The party having inspected this portion of the wall, drove to the western side of the rampart, to inspect an elliptical amphitheatre.

Near to the amphitheatre, Mr. Bowly pointed out a long barrow, the earliest sepulchral proof of the existence of man in Britain. The barrow had, he said, been excavated, but no trace of any metal whatever could be discovered.

On the way to the amphitheatre a call was made at Mr. Bowly's residence, and here some recent discoveries of interest were inspected. The most important of these was an altar which was found a few days ago in the course of the sewerage works near the Cottage Hospital in Sheep Street. The altar, which measured thirty inches long by fifteen inches broad, bore evident traces of the fire used in making the offerings. In the niche attached to the altar is a youthful god, crowned, the rays of the sun surmounting the figure evidencing the divinity. The cornucopia was on the left of the figure, and the god was pouring out a libation from a patera over an altar. There was an inscription on the top of the altar, which is as follows :— G. S. HV. I (indistinct), a letter missing, a piece of what looks like an S., and then L.O., the remainder being broken off. A squeeze of the inscription was sent to Dr. Hubner, of Berlin, the most eminent authority in the world on these subjects, and his interpretation of the incription is as follows : "G (enio) S (acrum) Hujus Loci "—"Sacred to the genius of this locality." Dr. Hubner states that the dot after HV in the middle of the word is only added for the

sake of symmetry. Unfortunately the alter is in no less than forty-five pieces, and Mr. Bowly, whose rendering of the inscription is completely confirmed by Dr. Hubner, has displayed considerable ingenuity in placing them together. Some skulls recently found at Watermoor were next inspected. Mr. Bowly pointed out that this part of the city was a great Roman burying place, but he also reminded his hearers of the fact alluded to by him in a letter of his, recently published in one of the newspapers, viz., that Sir John Byron pursued and overtook near this spot a body of Parliamentary troops, and slew a hundred of them. The question was, then, whether these were Roman or Commonwealth skulls. They were only two feet under ground, and the skeletons were those of men over six feet, and that went against their being Romans. Opinions seemed divided as to whether the skulls were modern or of the Gallic race, or those of Roman Britons—Britons who had adopted Roman civilization. One of the heads was particularly fine, being that of a man apparently about thirty or forty, while another appeared to be that of a man about sixty.

This completed the programme, and the party now drove to the Cricket Pavillion in Oakley Park, where dinner was laid, Lord Bathurst having kindly, at Mr. Anderson's request, given the Society leave to use it for this purpose.

The thanks of the Society were, with great sincerity, offered to those gentlemen whose kindness had so largely contributed to the success of the day's excursion, especially to Mr. Fuller and Mr. Bowly, and the proceedings were brought to a close.