Mortimer in Olden Time.

By the Rev. C. Lovett Cameron.

SAXON TOMBSTONE IN S. MARY'S CHURCH.—When the old Parish Church was pulled down in 1866 to make room for the present one, built on a much larger scale, it was evident that it was itself the successor of others, which had occupied the same site, and it was in consequence necessary, after clearing away a mass of confused material, to expend an abnormal sum in securing the foundations. The actual edifice was indeed not worthy of preservation, for though it dated back probably to the 14th century—the chancel screen can hardly have been later than the 15th century—it had been at various periods spoiled and modernized, but it is greatly to be regretted that the Norman shafts in the north doorway, which undoubtedly belonged to an earlier building, were not carefully taken down, and either incorporated in the new Church or re-erected in the Churchyard.

Under the floor of the tower was, however, discovered, broken in two, the stone cover of a Saxon tomb, which excited much interest at the time, and which has a very important bearing on the annals of our parish. The face of the inscription was turned downwards, and there were no traces of the tomb itself, from which it must have been detached many centuries ago. The period which was at first assigned to it is the 9th century, but it seems far more probable that it dates from about the year 1020, when the Church was rebuilt after the invasion of the Danes, who in 1006 laid this district utterly waste, burning and destroying towns and villages. The stone was affixed in the new Church to the wall of the organ-chamber, used for many years as a vestry, in which were also placed two brasses of the 15th century and a window of ancient glass, but the position was quite unworthy of an object of such archæological interest, and from being entirely unprotected, the lettering of the inscription was gradually becoming more or less obliterated. Accordingly in 1896, the date of the dedication of the new vestry, organ and bells, the tombstone was placed in the chancel, being protected by an orna-

mented grille, where it can be seen and examined by any visitors to the Church.

It may be well to quote here from "The Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries, December 16th, 1887," the actual description given by Professor Westwood of the stone :—"It is a large sepulchral slab, measuring 6 feet 6 inches in length, and 20 inches wide at the top, and 14 inches at the foot of the stone. With the exception of the marginal inscription, the stone is destitute of any ornamental or other design. The letters of the inscription are 1¾ inches tall, and are enclosed by two straight incised lines, having a space of about 2¼ inches wide between them, extending all round the stone. The inscription commences on the left hand of the head, or top, of the stone, and is carried along the right margin, the narrow foot, and the left margin of the stone. The letters of the inscription are for the most part well-formed Roman capitals, interspersed with a few Anglo-Saxon letters. It is a fortunate circumstance that the inscription is entire. It reads :—

✠ VIII - KL' - OCTB | FVIT - POSITVS ÆGELƿARDVS - FILIVS - KYPPINGVS IN ISTO LOC| O BEATV| S SIT OMO QVI ORAT PRO ANIMA EIVS + TOKI ME SCRIPSIT |

The English translation of these Latin words runs thus :—"On the 8th before the Kalends of October (September 24th) Ægelward son of Kypping was laid in this place. Blessed be the man who prays for his soul. Toki wrote me."

We may quote from a letter of the Rev. J. Earle, Professor of Anglo-Saxon in the University of Oxford, December 5th, 1866 :—"I am more than ever convinced with the rare and remarkable nature of the object. I hope that it will be assigned a worthy situation in a good light. It is quite worthy of a cabinet with a plate glass front, in the same manner as the Rosetta Stone is exhibited in the British Museum."

We need not weary our readers with the lengthy discussions as to this matter, but merely give the result, which seems trustworthy. The Ægelward of this inscription may in all probability be identified with Ædelward, ealdorman of Hampshire, mentioned in the Saxon Chronicle, A.D. 994, who was a most distinguished individual, being himself an historian and the person to whom Ælfric, Archbishop of Canterbury (994-1005), dedicated his Homilies and his translation of Genesis. He would seem to have lived some 25 years after the above date, and to have made friends on peace being established

with his former enemies, the Danes. His death would then be soon after the accession of Canute to the throne (1017), and it is probable that he was buried in front of the Altar of the Church, which was re-built under his auspices, and at his expense. Further light is thrown upon the inscription by the name of Toki, of whom Professor Westwood says—"I am induced to suppose that Toki was the person by whom the stone was ordered to be made, and that he simply wrote the inscription on paper, and gave orders for it to be carved on the stone." This Toki was "a very mighty and wealthy courtier" of King Canute, and is mentioned in several documents ranging from 1019 to 1043. An elaborate paper, giving an account of him, was published in the Memoirs of the Society of Northern Antiquities, 1845-1852, by a Danish writer, C. F. Rafn.

The explanation, given above, becomes almost a certainty when we turn to the Domesday Book and find there that a member of this family, a Cheping, which must be the same as Kypping, for the spelling of those days continually varied, held two of the Stratfield Manors in the reign of Edward the Confessor. As we read these data, the Manors were in the possession of the Kyppings in the century preceding the Conquest, and of this family Ædelward the ealdorman was the most distinguished representative. The original founder of the family must have had the name of Kyppa; Kypping meaning a descendant of Kyppa.

So far as we have been able to ascertain, this tombstone in our Parish Church is some 250 years older than any other in Berkshire, one of the 13th century at Didcot, said by tradition to be that of an abbot of Abingdon, being next to this the most ancient in the county. We may add that our Church is mentioned in Domesday book, as worth £18 in King Edward's reign, and £10 10s. after the Conquest, the depreciation of property being at that time general throughout England in consequence of the late troubles, and especially in this district, where a stubborn resistance had been made to the Norman invasion.