



The Berks, Bucks & Oxon Archæological Journal.

Gossip of an Antiquary.

OUR neighbours in Wiltshire have just been celebrating the Jubilee of their venerable and vigorous Archæological Society, which under the skilful management of its excellent Secretary, the Rev. E. H. Goddard continues to flourish. Their proceedings lasted over three days. The first day was devoted to business meetings and social gatherings. On the second day excursions were made to Wansdyke, that wonderful earthwork which is from 60 to 80 miles in length, and extends from the Severn near Portishead to Andover; to the old manor house and church at Avebury, to Kennett, Silbury Hill—the largest artificial mound in England—and Bishop's Cannings Church. On the third day they visited Potterne Church, erected about 1220, which has a curious Saxon font, the Elizabethan residence, Porch House, in the same village, West Lavington, Tilshead, and the ever-interesting Stonehenge. A sufficiently lengthy programme truly. Perhaps some day the Berks Archæological Society might attempt a two days' excursion. I have noticed that sometimes our proceedings are somewhat hurried. If we were only freed from the deadly peril of being obliged to catch trains we should have more time to closely examine the many objects of interest to which our attention is called.

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A few days ago we had a very pleasant excursion to Maidenhead, Hurley, and Lady Place. We much enjoyed the Vicar of Hurley's

description of the village and church which he knows so well. But we had too little time to inspect all the charms of that interesting spot, and possibly some of the party enjoyed afterwards a youthful nightmare in which they spied Birinus chasing Henry VIII. with a large frying pan, whilst Geoffrey de Mandeville held back the Prior of Hurley by the coat tails to prevent him from interfering. A two days' excursion would prevent such appalling results of an antiquarian visitation.

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It is interesting to note that one member of the party, Lord Saye and Sele, is a relative of Geoffrey de Mandeville, who founded Hurley Priory in the time of William the Conqueror. Beatrix de Mandeville, who was the daughter of William de Mandeville—the first Constable of the Tower of London—and granddaughter of the above-named Geoffrey married (as her second husband) William de Say. They were the grand-parents of Beatrice, the wife of Geoffrey Fitz Piers, 4th Earl of Essex and Lord Chief Justice of England (1199—1213). The Barons Say are descended from William de Say, who was grandfather to William, Beatrix de Mandeville's second husband.

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Beneath the din and turmoil of Fleet Street, London, the relics of ages long past peacefully repose. Below the spot where the *Daily Chronicle* issues its news to the world, there have recently been discovered the remains of a great woolly-haired rhinoceros, including the greater part of the skull, wonderfully well preserved. Professor Ray Lankester assigns them a venerable age of 150,000 years.

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Visitors to Venice miss the sight of the beautiful old Campanile which together with St. Mark's formed such a striking feature of this favourite city. Modern architects are trying to re-build it on the old plans, but they have fearful difficulties to overcome. They find that the foundations will not be strong enough to support the enormous weight. Faint-hearted ones suggest a lighter and smaller Campanile. But even this plan will not do. The architects find that new foundations would not cohere with the old on account of the peculiar composition of the soil of Venice.

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Mr. Bosworth Smith has been singing the praises of old thatched houses in the *Nineteenth Century*. Modern District Councils wage

war against thatch for roofs, but what can be more picturesque? The high-pitched thatch roof gives its chief charm to an old rectory house. Delightfully warm in winter and cool in summer—the exact opposite of a roof of slate—it gives a sense of comfort, of coziness, of hospitality, of homeliness to any building which it shelters.

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Thatching is, in truth, a fine art. The fame of the thatcher, generally an hereditary occupation handed down in long and jealous succession from father to son, spreads, if only he be an adept in his art, far beyond his own to all the surrounding villages. His personality often ranks next after that of the village clerk, the chief of the village hierarchy, and is as marked in its way as that of the game-keeper, of the mole-catcher, of the ruddle-man so well described by Mr. Thomas Hardy in his "Return of the Native." A beauty and interest of its own attaches to every portion of his handiwork, and that, too, at each succeeding stage of its youth, its maturity, its decay. Notice, for instance, the exquisitely neat finish of the whole; the geometrical patterns formed by the spars just below, which help by their grip to hold it in its place for years; the faultless symmetry of the slopes, the clean-cut edges, the gentle curves of the thatch, heaving, as it were, of its own accord, to canopy the windows which rise above the plate; and, better still, the embrace which, as with the encircling arms of a mother, it gives to the deep-planted, half-hidden, dormer window in the middle of the roof, nestling lovingly within it, and by its very look inviting to peacefulness and repose. Note, too, the change of colouring in the work as time goes on; the rich golden-russet tint, beautiful as the locks of Ceres, when the work is just completed; the warm brown of the succeeding years; the emerald green, the symptom of advancing age, when lichens and moss have begun to gather thick upon it; and, "last scene of all which ends its quiet, uneventful history," when the winds and rain have done their work upon it, the rounded, meandering ridges, and the sinuous, deep-cut furrows, which, like the waters in a troubled sea, ruffle its once smooth surface.

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Discoveries of much interest have been made at Tintern Abbey in the course of certain works undertaken by the Crown when the latter acquired the ruins from the Beaufort estate. Part of the original system of drainage has been disclosed, and, by the removal of old cottages built into the Abbey, gateways and windows formerly hidden have been brought to light. Most interesting of all is the discovery

of the lay brothers' staircase. On the demolition of an old cottage and by subsequent excavations the workmen found a doorway leading from the lay brothers' quarters to the staircase, and thence by the door named after them into the Abbey.

Somerton Church, Oxon.

OUR Illustrations show two interesting features of the Old Church of St. James, Somerton. This ancient Village, about 14 miles north of Oxford, has much historical interest. Near it is the old British boundary called Wattlebank or Avesditch. Odo Bishop of Bayeux, half-brother of William the Conqueror, who absorbed so many English Manors, became possessed of the Manor. Then the ancient family of the Greys held it, but when the Battle of Bosworth sealed the fate of the Yorkists, they were deprived of the Manor which was granted to Jasper, Duke of Bedford. Then Henry VIII. granted it to William Fermor, Clerk of the Crown, whose family adhered to the Roman Catholic faith for many generations; the renowned Arabella Fermor, famous for her beauty, married Francis Perkins of Upton in 1715.

This William Fermor built Tusmore, a fine Elizabethan Manor-house, which gave place to a more modern Mansion in 1770. He like many a noble Lord had a Jester, the renowned Will Somers, who afterwards became the favourite of his royal Master; and when Fermor fell out of Court favour and was oppressed by Henry VIII., Will Somers pleaded his cause and obtained justice for the jester's former benefactor. The Church at Somerton contains many tombs and brasses of the Fermors. This Church was first built in late Norman times. The Chancel-arch is transitional Norman: but the Chancel, Nave and Tower were re-built in the 14th Century in the decorated style. A Chantry was added late in the 15th Century. One of the most interesting features of the Church is the Stone Sculpture of the Rood or Typanum inserted in the north side of the Tower. The Tower was built at the end of the 14th Century. The sculpture belongs to the early part of the reign of Edward III.; and it is probable that the architect, when the tower was built, not