



A Tour Through Buckinghamshire.

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(Continued from page 48, Vol. 9.)

SECTION X.—ROAD—NEWPORT PAGNELL TO OLNEY.

The railway does not go beyond Newport, but a few years ago tram-rails were laid down on the side of the Olney road, and bridges were built, but the project was never completed.

After crossing the river at Sherington bridge, the road reaches SHERINGTON, 2 miles. The Church (St. Laud the Martyr, register 1698) is an interest Decorated edifice with a central tower. The arcades have round piers N. and Octagonal S. with good capitals. The E. window is Decorated. There are brasses with arms of Catesby; and to Robert Yonge and Ada his Wife, 1517; and Richard Mariot, 1691. The Church, which stands on a slight eminence, was restored 1870.

This was one of the Manors given by Dean Colet as an endowment to the Mercers' Company.

Here halted the Army of Fairfax on its way into Northamptonshire and to Naseby Field.

Two-and-a-half miles further is EMBERTON. Here in 1469 the Rebels from the N., under Robin of Redesdale, were assembled ready to attack King Edward IV. at Olney, but the Earl of Warrick, the King-maker, rode out from the Royal camp, and persuaded the Rebels to disband.

The Church (All Saints register 1659) is chiefly decorated. The E. window of five lights has good tracery. There is a brass to John Morden, alias Andrew, Rector, c. 1410, who built the tower. His effigy represents him in his vestments, and he presented books, the inscription tells us, to his own Church, and also to those of

Olney and Hulle-Morton (Hill-Morton) in Warwickshire. The books given to Olney were church office books, and amongst them was a copy of the "Golden Legend."

Two miles further N. the road crosses the Ouse by the bridge :

*" That, with its wearisome but needful length
Bestrides the flood,"*

and enters the little Town of OLNEY.

The bridge spans the main river with three arches, and a causeway which has taken the place of the long bridge of Cowper's time runs across the meadows, and crosses the S. branch of the river with a single arch. The long bridge was built in the days of Queen Anne by two Squires, Sir Robert Throckmorton of Weston Underwood, and William Lowndes of Astwood Manor. These two gentlemen were sometimes prevented from paying visits to one another by floods, as they lived on opposite sides of the Ouse. They accordingly built the long bridge in continuation of an older one of which only a small portion remains at the N. end. Sir Robert found the material, and Mr. Lowndes the labour.

The Town is chiefly built round a large triangular Market-place. There is a station on the Bedford and Northampton branch of the Midland railway, half-mile N.

There are some houses which contain marks of antiquity. A house on the N. side of the town has an oak ceiling, and carving of Tudor date. In a house at the N. extremity is some curious stucco work, and in a room on the ground floor a figure of a Man on horseback with the date "Anno 1634."

The house in which William Cowper, the poet, lived from 1767 to 1786, called *Orchard Side*, a red brick building with stone dressings, is on the S. side of the Market-place. Here he always had the company of his faithful friend and constant attendant, Mrs. Unwin, and here he kept his hares. He occupied a portion of the house only. Downstairs is a hall into which the street door opened, and a parlour. The hares Bess, Puss, and Tiny, were allowed to gambol in the hall and had their sleeping box in one corner. The creatures were sold to him at different times by some farm-lads. Cowper immortalized them both in prose and verse. Bess died young, Puss died of old age about the time that the Poet left Olney, "Old Tiny surliest of his kind," died a few years previously.

Cowper has described both his winter and summer life at Orchard Side, minutely. In winter during the day-light his favourite

seat was at the round window in the parlour, but as twilight came on he gave his orders :

*" Now stir the fire and close the shutters fast,
Let fall the curtains, wheel the sofa round,
So let us welcome peaceful evening in."*

In the summer he lived a sort of out-of-door life in a greenhouse, or in a wooden summer-house which still stands in the garden which was then let with the house. He writes : " In the summer-house I write all that I write in summer time, whether to friends or to the public."

To reach the summer-house turn up a lane which runs out of the street S. of the Market-place.

Dr. Bull at times came over from Newport Pagnell and sat and smoked in the summer-house in the company of his friend, though Cowper himself was no smoker.

" The smoke inhaling Bull, always filling never full," kept his pipe and tobacco in a receptacle under the floor in which a former tenant, an apothecary, had kept his bottles.

At the back of the summer-house was a door which opened into a close across which Cowper acquired a right of way so that he might visit John Newton at the Vicarage without walking down the street, a proceeding which the shy poet much disliked.

The Vicarage is near the Church. It was almost re-built for Newton in 1767, by Lord Dartmouth the patron of the living. It is a good example of a comfortable dwelling of the XVIII. century, with long sash windows and a high-pitched roof.

Newton became curate-in-charge of Olney in 1764, and resigned the curacy, in 1780, for the living of St. Mary, Woolnoth, in the City of London. He used one of the attic rooms as his study, probably for the sake of quiet. The then Vicar was Moses Browne, a pluralist, who also held the Rectory of Sutton in Lincolnshire, and the chaplaincy of Morden College, Blackheath. Cowper lived in the Vicarage for a few months when he first arrived at Olney, and was a guest there again in 1773 for a year, during one of his unhappy attacks of mental malady. The " Olney Hymns" of which Cowper wrote sixty-eight, were produced by the two friends shortly before that date.

Lady Austen, Cowper's friend, rented a portion of the Vicarage for about two years, and his cousin, Lady Hesketh, occupied the house for six months about 1786.

Thomas Scott, the Commentator, succeeded Newton as curate-in-charge at Olney in 1781, and lived at the Vicarage till 1785.

Another Vicar of some note was Henry Gauntlett, who was first curate from 1811 to 1815, and then became Vicar. He was the father of Dr. Henry Gauntlett, the church musician, whose early life was spent at Olney, and who at the age of ten years took his place at the organ, then newly erected.

To the east of the church is the site of the "Great House," which was the property of Lord Dartmouth in the time of Newton. Nothing is left but the piers of the entrance gates. The "Great House" was lent by Lord Dartmouth to the Vicar for prayer meetings and lectures, and he himself was an occasional visitor at Olney, and called on his old school-fellow, Cowper.

The fine Decorated church (St. Peter and St. Paul, register 1668), stands in an excellent position on the banks of the river. The spire rises to a height of 185 feet, and the tower contains the fine peal of bells beloved by Cowper:—

*"Again the harmony comes o'er the vale,
And through the trees I view the embattled tower,
Whence all the music."*

The spire with its four tiers of windows rather resembles those of the adjoining county of Northampton. The clerestory and Perpendicular roof were taken down in 1800. The chancel is deflected to the N. The E. window is curious in its proportions but the tracery is modern.

Cowper's pew was in the N. gallery, which still remains.

The Church was restored 1870 under the direction of Sir G. G. Scott. It is of about the middle of the XIV. century.

In the churchyard once stood a chantry chapel founded by Lord Basset.

There is a tradition that there was an earlier church at the other end of the town between the Lavendon and Warrington roads.

The Baptist Meeting, an old-fashioned building, was the scene of the ministrations of several distinguished pastors. John Sutcliffe was minister from 1776 to 1814. He founded a Seminary at Olney, and William Carey, the Northamptonshire shoe-maker, afterwards a distinguished Baptist Missionary in India, was one of the students. Carey occasionally preached, when a young man, at Olney. Twelve other students worked in Eastern Missions.

The country and villages round Olney are full of reminiscences of Cowper.

(To be continued.)