

The plates were relaid in a soft stone about 1850. As the palimpsest character of the effigies was known to Mr. Haines, whose work on *Monumental Brasses* appeared in 1861, it may be safely assumed that there is nothing engraved on the reverses of the inscription and the shield, for these must have been seen at the same time. In consequence of the unsuitable nature of the new stone the effigies became loose again about twenty years after being relaid. They were refixed a few years ago with keyed screws under the auspices of the "Oxford Brass-Rubbing Society" (now the "Oxford Antiquarian Society"), which has done similar good work with interesting palimpsests in the neighbouring churches of Ewelme and Checkendon and elsewhere.

Notes on Stebenton, Berks.

by *Walter Money, F.S.A.*

THERE is probably no sight which surprises a foreigner more on his first visit to England, and especially if he is one of our American friends, than the picturesque half-timbered houses which are still to be found in some of our old Berkshire villages ; not only on account of their old-world beauty, but as affording a valuable glimpse of the family life of the middle-class countryman in the days of our forefathers. Probably in no part of the country can be seen such delightful bits of half-timbered domestic architecture of the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries than in the now secluded village of Steventon ; although at one time it was one of the best known places on the Oxford and Southampton road, when the mail coaches daily rattled along its borders, after having passed the " Bay of Biscay," as the " Old Salts " used to term the bit of road over Ilsley Downs. Here can still be found a curious assemblage of primitive porches, antique roofs and gables, lattice windows and ancient doorways, all betokening the age when there was an abundance of oak in the country, and proclaiming the inherited dexterity of our village

carpenters with the axe and the chisel. Inside, many of the houses are panelled in oak, with massive oak tie beams, quaint old staircases, solid flooring, and original roofs, carefully wrought, and moulded in heart of oak, and as sound as when constructed more than three centuries ago.

One of the most noticeable of the remaining old houses, dated 1657, has a pargetted front, with barge boards, and has two curiously panelled and painted rooms inside. In the sitting room there is an old oak painted chimney piece, and above the entablature two oblong panels with frame mouldings, on which landscapes are painted, reminding one very much of the painted room at Littlecote, the work of the Dutch prisoners, about the same date (1657); and in a room, now used as a kitchen, is another chimney-piece of the same character, but with three panels. All this work appears to be contemporary with the house, and it is remarkable that it should have been so well preserved during all the vicissitudes to which the old house has been subjected.

For, since we first knew Steventon, many of the charming ancient buildings, so happily grouped together, have either been destroyed or subjected to much disfigurement by the removal of the old lattice quarries in the windows, and other painful innovations. The usual thing is that—the tenants say that their houses are cold and leaky, the landlord gets tired of the patchwork of the village carpenter, orders the building to be pulled down, and a hideous red-brick cottage, with a slate roof, of the Noah's Ark style of architecture, rises in its place. The whole transaction results from ignorance of construction, and an utter insensibility to the value of a bygone art.

Every remnant of the work of these unknown old village artists becomes more and more precious now the Philistine is abroad.

OUR OLD ROADS.

How, and under what authority, in our own country, road and bridge making was conducted in early times, would be a curious subject for inquiry. In a *Guide for Surveyors of Highways and Bridges*, about 1689, three kinds of ways are described—"First a Footway called *Iter*, quod est *jus eundi vel ambulandi hominis*. Secondly, a Footway and a Horse-way, called *actus ab agendo*, and this is vulgarly called a Pack or Drift-way, and is both a foot-way and horse-way. Thirdly, a Cart-way, etc., called *Via* or *Aditus* (and containeth the other two, and a Cart-way also) for this is *jus eundi*,

vehendi and vehiculum and jumentum ducendi, and this is twofold, viz., *Via Regia*, the King's Highway for all Men and communis *Strata*, belonging to a City or Town, or between Neighbours."

The roads at this time must have been very "founderous" for it is enacted, says the above Guide, that if people cannot pass along the common track and there be means of getting out of it on either side, the users may enter upon the neighbouring lands, although they be sown with corn, and which becomes the King's highway as well as the accustomed track, for His Majesty's subjects must have a free passage. Further, that where a road goes through a man's land, and he fences it on both sides, by so doing he makes himself liable to repair this part of the highway, and keep it passable. The repair of roads and bridges at this time appears to have been carried out on the communal system, it being an obligation on every owner and occupier of land and tenement in a parish to send so many carts and men with the necessary tools for the work, and who could appropriate without asking leave, any suitable material for the roads they saw near at hand, and also had liberty to dig for gravel without being liable for trespass on anyone's land, but not to make a pit above ten yards in breadth or length, and this to be filled up at the expense of the parish within one month after the required material has been taken out.

THE CAUSEY OR CAUSEWAY.

On approaching this village, beloved by artists, it is impossible not to be struck with its very picturesque appearance, with a stone causeway or flood-path, extending the whole length of the village-street, and planted with trees on both sides. This pleasant and serviceable walk, dry and available in all weathers, was due, according to local traditional story, to the monastic fraternity at the Priory, which is very probable, as was the case at Glastonbury, where there is still a causeway a mile long, called Graylake's Foss, made by the abbots, chiefly for communicating with their estates. But, if the question as to who constructed this laudable work of providing a good footing for the village folk in all time to come, instead of a swampy walk, be somewhat obscure, we have good evidence to show that "two sisters" left funds to maintain it.

An inscription on a dole board in the church, some of the words on which are rendered in the most barbarous provincialism of the seventeenth century, informs us that "Two sisters by ancient report gave a yard land one acre of meadow four swathes one Taylers

yeard one Close and a Copps to ye maintenance of ye Causeway of Steventon." A yard land is a well-understood quantity, varying, according to the place, from 15 to 40 acres, but we can make nothing of "four swathes," unless it means as much as could be cut with the scythe in four swathes. A "Taylers yeard" is another puzzle as applied to land measure. The endowment provided by the two sisters is in the hands of trustees, and brings in about £30 a year, which accounts for the excellent state of the Causeway, part of the funds being used for lighting the pathway during the winter months, which the trustees rightly conceive to be strictly within both the letter and spirit of the charity at the time it was established.

The inhabitants have therefore daily reason to be thankful for the foresight and public spirit of these worthy but unknown benefactresses, who left such a substantial and serviceable memorial of their desire to secure to the village-folk a safe and easy public thoroughfare free from the cost of maintenance, to those who enjoy it. In the days when roads were "founderous," rivers had to be passed, and footpaths were none at all. Now and then a great person would be drowned, or nearly so. Instances of perpetual endowment for the repair of roads, and providing bridges are by no means common, and in the hall of St. Helen's Hospital at Abingdon there is hanging up a long ditty in praise of the builder of Culham Bridge, one verse of which in modern phrase runs thus:—

"King Harry the Fifth in his fow-erth year
 Hath found for his folk a bridge in Berkshire;
 For carriage and cart to come and go clear,
 That winters before, were soused in the mire.
 And some from their saddles flopped down to the ground,
 Or into the water, wist no man where."

All honour to the "two sisters" for their part in the useful and enduring work by which they are represented, and who may well say, slightly paraphrasing the words applied to Sir Christopher Wren, "If you want to see our monument, look around you."

THE PRIORY.

In ancient days Steventon could boast of a religious foundation—a small Priory, a cell or dependency to the famous Abbey of Bec Hellouin, in Normandy, founded by Hellouin, son of Angot and Hellios, 1034, famous for having given three Archbishops to the See of Canterbury—Lanfranc, Anselm and Theobald. This Abbey held with others in England, the manors and churches of Okeburn

or Ogbourne St. George and Ogbourne St. Andrew, Wilts, the gift of Maud de Wallingford, the church, manor, and priory of Steven-ton, the gift of King Henry I., the church and manor of Combe, Hants, the gift of Ameline, the wife of Ernulf de Hesding, the Domesday lord of Newbury, and Membury, near Ramsbury, the gift of Isabel de Chandos.

The state of serfdom under which the tenants of these alien Priors lived is described by Dom John Bourget, himself a Benedictine monk, in his "*History of the Abbey Bec-Hellouin.*" He says :—"The tenants were to pay scot and lot, by way of aid to the Abbots when they came into England, or their proctors if the necessities of the Abbey were very urgent. They could not sell a horse-colt, nor an ox of their own bringing up, without their lord's leave, nor marry their daughters, nor go to live out of the manor, nor remove their chattels out of it without license. They paid at every death the best beast for a heriot, or 32d. instead of it ; and if anyone died intestate all their chattels were at the lord's disposition."

The priors of all the Alien Priors in England dependent on the Abbey of Bec were obliged to attend the general chapters held there, and give an account of their houses, both with regard to spiritual and temporal matters, and the priors were changed at the will of the chapter of the Abbey. During the war with France, in the reign of Edward III., these Alien Priors were oppressed, but meanwhile the Abbey of Bec Hellouin sold the manor of Steven-ton to Sir Hugh Calveley, whose trustees conveyed it in 1393, to John Bishop of Salisbury and Roger Walden, supposed to have been trustees for the owner, as the manor was soon after in the hands of the King, who granted it to the Abbot and Convent of Westminster, and it now belongs to the Dean and Chapter of that Church, who are the impropiators of the great tithes and patrons of the Vicarage.

The priory stood at the west end corner of the village street, nearly opposite the church, and the buildings seem to have occupied a small quadrangle. On the site, now occupied by several tene-ments, is one of the most picturesque half-timbered fronts in Steven-ton. The carving on the barge boards in the gable is admirably free, with pendants on either side, and the whole tone of this frag-ment has a rich and beautiful effect. We can remember a very handsome carved oak chimney-piece in this house, with figures, and the following Latin inscriptions :—"Judica domine nocentes me ; Expugna in pugnantes me" ; but these together with the whole of

the panelling and doors of the period, were removed some years ago to Sutton Courtenay.

Between the Priory and the Manor-house there was formerly a large fish-pond, but which has long since been filled in. The Abbey Church of Bec was very beautiful, the altar consisting of eight large columns of fine jasper, with bases of bronze gilt. The screen was entirely composed of the finest and rarest Italian marbles, with four jasper pilasters, with bases of white marble, the metopes were also of jasper. On the tympanum of the frontispiece, also in jasper, were the figures, in mezzo-relievo, of Adam and Eve under the fatal tree. On the cornice was a balustrade of jasper, which was considered a masterpiece of beauty, with the figure of the Virgin and St. John. The finest blue turquoise marble was also introduced with great effect. The famous Abbey of Bec, which is about two miles from Brionne, has been demolished except a tower of the 15th century, and the vast conventual buildings erected in the 17th century were, when we visited the place some years ago, used as a remount depot for the French army.

THE WISEMAN FAMILY.

In the church there are some memorials of the Wisemans, who lived at the old manor-house which stood within a moated enclosure at the rear of the house now occupied by Mr. Tyrrell, the site of which is denoted by an old arched granary. This family, of considerable note in the county, also had a fine mansion called "Spersholt Court," alias "Southcote," in the parish of West Hendred, but the house, with its ancient chapel, has long since been pulled down. There are pedigrees of the Wisemans of Steventon and Spersholt Court, in the Heralds Visitations of 1623 and 1665-66, from which it appears they were allied by marriage to the Blagraves of Sonning, the Southbys of Carswell, the Knollyses of Stanford-in-the-vale, Hobbs of Ardington, the Whites of Fifield, Clarkes of Ardington, Dunches of Pusey and the Crokes of Faringdon.

Of this family, Edmund Wiseman served the office of Sheriff of Berks in 1594, Sir Charles Wiseman, Bart., in 1612, Edmund Wiseman in 1668, and Sir Edmund Wiseman in 1685. There is an elaborate brass in the vestry of Steventon Church, formerly a chantry chapel, to Edmund Wiseman, son to Thomas Wiseman of Thornham, co. Suffolk, who was son and heir of Sir John Wiseman, Knt., and Anne, his wife, who died in 1584.

The inscriptions below the effigies, engraved on two separate

plates, have been re-fixed upside down. Above them are shields of arms, one bearing the arms of Wiseman—Sa a chevron erm., between three cronels arg. Crest—A castle triple-towered, or, port open, arg. out of the top a demi-Moor issuant, armed ppr., in his right hand a dart, argent, barbed and flighted, or, in his left a Roman target, of the last. On a black marble slab adjoining, with arms and crest incised, is an inscription commemorative of Edmund Wiseman, who died in 1689, and Susanna, his second wife, daughter of John Clarke of Ardington, ancestor of the antiquary. Another marble slab is inscribed to the memory of Dulcibella, wife of Edmund Wiseman, second daughter of Samuel Dunch, of Pusey, who died in 1656, aged 37, also a small brass to William Wiseman, who died in 1713, and was the son of Edmund Wiseman, of Spersholt Court.

THE SMALBONE FAMILY.

The Smalbones were an old Steventon family whose arms are entered in the Heralds Visitations of 1665-6. They intermarried with the Rowlands of Harwell, the Stevenses of Steventon, Robinsons of East Hanney, Woods of Steventon, Harding of Wantage, Dandridge of Blewbury, etc. Another branch of the Smalbones lived at Bockhampton, and Up Lambourn, and were allied to the families of Molyne, Scudamores, Eystons and other ancient houses.

Reviews.

RUINED AND DESERTED CHURCHES by L. E. Beedham (Elliot Stock, London). Miss Beedham has chosen a very interesting subject for her work, and writes pleasantly on the deserted shrines of England. Her book will be valuable in calling the attention of the general public to a subject which for many years has disturbed the minds of antiquaries, and aroused poignant but unavailing regret. This book is by no means exhaustive. It does not record a tithe of the ruined and deserted churches to be found in England. Whole counties are neglected. Some of the hundred desecrated shrines of Derbyshire might have been mentioned, or Arborfield, Berkshire, or Colston Bassett, Notts, or St. Margaret's on the Blyth, Suffolk, and many other important omissions might be added. We hope Miss Beedham will continue her researches and produce an enlarged edition of her work, which would then be extremely valuable to students.