

The Church (All Saints or St. Michaels, register 1594) is one of the most remarkable in the county. It was restored in 1875 under the direction of Sir Gilbert Scott, who was born in this neighbourhood at Gawcott, and is said to have taken his first ideas of Gothic architecture from this building. He presented the ceiling of the porch and its pinnacles.

The church was built in 1493, and is an excellent example of late Perp. architecture. The tower is the earliest portion. There is a chapel on the N. side of the chancel, at the N.E. angle of which is a turret finished with pinnacles, ogee ribs and a finial. The clerestory is formed by rows of lights in panels.

Within, on the wall-plate of the chancel walls, are rows of angels, some bearing instruments and others music. The E. window has ancient glass representing scenes from the life of St. Nicholas. There is a fine rood-screen. There is a fine alabaster tomb with full length effigies of Thomas Denton and his wife, 1560; and among the monuments are those of Dr. William Denton, physician to Charles I. and Charles II., 1691; Sir Alexander Denton, Justice of the King's Bench, 1739, and Katharine, his wife, 1733; Alexander Denton, 1574, and Mary, his wife, 1576; Alexander Denton and others, 1701-14; Elizabeth, wife of Thomas Isham, 1667; Thomas Isham, 1676; George Woodard, Ambassador to Poland, who died at Warsaw, 1731, and is buried here; Godfrey Boate, Justice of the King's Bench in Ireland, 1722, and Mary, his daughter, 1772, wife of Godfrey Clayton, 1745; Francis Drake, 1701; and Mary, Viscountess Hillsborough, 1742.

There are marks on the church door of bullets fired during the siege of the house.

In the church-yard is a cross, much mutilated, of the XIV. century, seven feet in height. There is a portion of the group of niches. Close by is the grave of Royalists who fell at the siege.

THE PROPOSED MEMORIAL TO KING HENRY THE FIRST, FOUNDER OF READING ABBEY.

At a recent meeting of the Reading Town Council a letter was read from Dr. Jamieson B. Hurry generously offering to erect in the Forbury Gardens a memorial to King Henry the First, the Founder

of Reading Abbey. Some particulars of the proposed memorial, and the reasons for its erection, will interest our readers.

The cross, composed of silver grey Cornish granite, will rise to a total height of twenty feet, and is designed in such architectural style as is appropriate to the period. The ornamentation of the head consists of Early English foliage on the arms, and of the simplest form of dog-tooth ornament on the circle. Five projecting and carved bosses mark the arms and centre of the cross. The stem, with slightly sunk faces, is divided into sections by a simply rounded moulding worked into a pattern at intervals. The massive base terminates above in three tiers, and rests on a broad platform of granite with steps on either side. Thus the memorial will rest on a broad foundation, which gives a sense of stability to the whole erection. The treatment of the back of the cross will be similar to that of the front; but on the sides of the base will be placed two metal shields bearing the arms of King Henry I. and those of Reading Abbey.

The inscription will be in lead letters sunk into the granite, and record the foundation of the Abbey by King Henry I. in 1121, and the burial of the same King before the High Altar of the splendid Abbey Church in 1136. Mr. W. Ravenscroft, F.S.A., is kindly acting as honorary architect.

The debt that Reading owes to King Henry Beauclerc, the Founder of its Abbey, has received but scant recognition. Had that "noble and royal monastery" been planted elsewhere, Reading might to this day have continued an obscure Thames-side village.

At the beginning of the 12th century "*Radingia*," to quote the name as stated in the Foundation Charter, was a mere hamlet of some thirty one-storied chimneyless hovels, built up of wattles, banked up with mud, and surrounded by fields, pastures and woodland. The humble villeins and bordars, clad in coarse woollen homespun, lived on the simplest of fare, and tilled the land of the King's demesne, together with their own holdings, which in the form of scattered strips surrounded the little burgh. Suddenly, to the astonishment of the villagers, appears a group of black-robed monks of unknown tongue and foreign garb. They had left their home at Cluny, hundreds of miles away, and tramped across France, all at the call of King Henry Beauclerc, who sought their aid in founding the great Monastery he purposed to erect to the glory of God. They take possession of a charmingly placed plot of ground (a site doubtless selected by the King himself), lying between the Kennet

and the Thames, with delightful views of those hill-slopes and meadowlands, which, alas ! are now obscured by smoky chimneys, snorting engines, hideous gas-holders, and the County Prison. Soon after—*i.e.*, on June 18th, 1121, the King himself appears, with Stephen, his successor on the throne, and many a great prelate and baron of the realm. With all the dignity of a royal pageant, Henry Beauclerc lays the foundation stone of what he intended to be an Abbey of unrivalled magnificence, and which, when finished, he hoped to dedicate to the worship of God for ever. Labourers and skilled artizans of every trade are soon at work to rear the great monastic church which excelled even the famous Abbey of Westminster in its dimensions, and which was adorned by everything that could attract the pilgrim and impress the worshipper at its shrines. Golden vessels were used on the altar ; stained glass, gorgeous tapestries, embroideries of tasteful design and colour all co-operated to enhance the splendour of the religious ceremonies.

The hopes of the Royal Founder, however, were doomed to disappointment. Long before the completion of the church, which in his Foundation Charter he says he is erecting "for the salvation of my soul, and of King William my father, and of King William my brother, and of William my son, and Queen Maud my mother, and Queen Maud my wife, and of all my ancestors and successors," the hand of death struck him down. But the Abbey of Reading, which he loved so dearly during life, and on which he lavished his choicest gifts, became his final resting place. On January 4th, 1136, the royal obsequies were celebrated with great pomp ; "*in ipsâ ecclesiâ ante altâr sepultum est*," King Stephen, the Archbishop, Bishops and nobles of the realm being present. In the following year his widow, the lovely Adeliza, paid a visit to the grave on the anniversary of the King's death, and placed a rich pall on the altar in memory of her husband. Subsequently a noble monument, with a life-size effigy, was erected to his memory.

The brethren who dwelt in the Abbey were men who lived and loved the religion they professed, and spent their lives in Christian worship and active benevolence. Their influence for good extended far and wide, and conferred great benefits on the little burgh beside which they dwelt. Roads and bridges were constructed, trade was fostered, education promoted, arts and crafts were taught, musical and literary studies were encouraged, improved methods of horticulture and agriculture superseded the old.

The stately Monastic Church, honoured by the grave of its Royal

Founder, sanctified by the reputed relics of prophet, of apostle, of Christ Himself, attracted pilgrims to its shrines, especially to that of St. James, whose hand was regarded as a much prized relic. The hospitium, situated on one of the great trade routes of the country, had one of the most frequented guest halls, and possessed an importance that can with difficulty be realised under the changed conditions of modern life.

The Abbey received signal marks of favour from the successive monarchs of the realm, enjoyed the special protection of the Holy See, was selected for great secular and ecclesiastical councils, and for several assemblies of Parliament. By all these and other means prestige, commercial prosperity and wealth were brought to Reading by the great Abbey at its gate. Better than all was the lesson taught by its very existence, and which Mr. W. M. Childs has so well expressed "that the noblest life is a life wisely ruled, a life consecrated by service to God and man." Doubtless as the years rolled on some of the monastic gold became mixed with dross; almoner and abbot became negligent of their duty; the brethren were no longer "a noble pattern of holiness"; the almshouse and the leper hospital closed their doors. Doubtless, too, the burghers keenly resented the control exercised by the great Lord Abbot. Their streams, their mills, their market, their land were at his mercy, and for two hundred years the galling yoke of a powerful ecclesiastical corporation hampered the development of individual liberty and the rights of self-government. Indeed it was not until the last Abbot had laid down his life on the scaffold, and the Abbey had been dissolved, that the burgesses obtained from King Henry VIII. the privileges they had so long striven for. Then at length struck the hour of liberty, and by the Charter of 1542 the Mayor and burgesses were constituted the governing body of the town, with full executive authority and jurisdiction.

If, however, the part played by the Abbey during its life of four hundred years is considered as a whole, it is fair to say that history records but little that is discreditable, and Reading should ever hold in grateful remembrance that ancient home of religion and learning, with "its monks of unwearied and delightful hospitality."

The memorial now offered to this ancient Borough should revive the memory of its early traditions, should increase the interest in its fascinating story, and kindle the desire that its citizens of to-day may play as worthy a part on the stage of history as their ancestors have done.

By the following letter was the generous gift conveyed :—
Abbotsbrook, Reading.

Feb. 25th, 1909.

To the Right Worshipful, the Mayor of Reading.

DEAR MR. MAYOR,—“ Amongst the famous events that the ancient Borough of Reading has witnessed, the founding of the Abbey on June 18th, 1121, by King Henry the First, and the burial of the same King on January 4th, 1136, hold an important place. The Royal body was buried before the high altar of the splendid Abbey Church, in the presence of King Stephen and of many nobles of the Realm.

Such historical landmarks, which link our civic with our national life, are worthy to be kept in remembrance, since they stimulate local patriotism and a desire to promote, to the utmost of our power, the beauty, prosperity and happiness of this Borough which it is our good fortune to inhabit.

In the hope of encouraging such patriotism, I have the pleasure of offering to erect in the Forbury Gardens, on the site of the Abbey Church, a memorial to its Royal founder, King Henry Beauclerc. The accompanying design, which has been kindly prepared by my friend, Mr. W. Ravenscroft, F.S.A., indicates the form of memorial proposed, viz., an Early English cross, in silver granite, 20 feet high, with mouldings appropriate to the Plantagenet period, and an inscription recording the burial of the King in the Abbey Church at Reading.”

Believe me, dear Mr. Mayor,

Yours faithfully,

JAMIESON B. HURRY.

THE BECHES, WOKINGHAM.—This house has recently been sold by Mr. F. C. C. Barnett to Mr. H. Pearson. It is a very picturesque old house, and is thus described in Lyson's History of Berkshire as “The Ancient Manor House of the De La Beche Family,” or more correctly, of Robert de la Beche, a branch of the family whose holdings were chiefly in mid-Berkshire. The only daughter and heiress of Robert de la Beche married one John Witelock about 1450, in the reign of Henry VI., who is described as thus becoming possessed of “The Manor of Beches, near Ockingham, Berks.” The old front door bears the date 1624, and the initials “R.” and “E.H.” which are believed to refer to one Richard Harrison and his wife, but there is in the town records, evidence that in 1729 one Richard Hawe died and bequeathed his property, including the “Holt” and the “Beches,” to his wife for life, and then to her six nieces.