



The History of Bisham Abbey.

By Sir Henry Vansittart Neale, K.C.B.

[A Paper read before the Berks Archæological Society on the occasion of their visit on Sept. 30th, 1910].

(Continued from page 116, Vol. 16.)

As regards the alleged sojourn here of Princess Elizabeth during Mary's reign, I may mention that the bow window of the Council Room is said to have been thrown out for her accommodation, and a dais (lately removed) placed in it, 16 inches above the floor. The Princess Elizabeth spring, about half-a-mile off, still exists. There used to be a stone hut there, probably used for bathing, but it has fallen down. An old mulberry tree in the garden is supposed to have been planted by the Princess.

The Abbey has had the honour of receiving Royalty several times. In 1518 Cardinal Pace writes to Cardinal Wolsey: "Tomorrow the King departeth to Bisham, as it is tyme for they die in these partes not only of the small pox and mezills but also off the great sickness." In another letter Pace mentions the King's commands for Princess Mary to come to Bisham. Henry was at Bysham again 28 Sept., 1529, in a Royal Progress. The record of his expenses is in existence. I observe 4 shillings is put down for charity. Another visit was paid in Nov., 1543, and documents were signed by the King, "Apud manerium nostrum de Bisham on 30 Nov. and 1 Dec." In August, 1592, Queen Elizabeth held a Privy Council meeting at Bisham, at which various business was transacted. The Queen was then paying a visit to Lady Elizabeth Russell, and was most splendidly received. At the top of Bisham hill, cornets sounding in the woods, a "wilde man" came forth and uttered a flattering speech. In the middle of the hill sat Pan and two virgins keeping sheep. Her Majesty stopped and listened to their conversation, most flattering to her. "We attend a sight more glorious than the sun rising. What, does Jupiter come this way? No but one that will make Jupiter blush as guilty of his unchaste jugglings. This way cometh the Queen of the Island, the wonder of the world, and nature's glory; leading affections in fetters, virginities slaves, embracing mildness with justice, Majesties twins. To

her we wish as many years as our fields have ears of corn, both infinite, and to her enemies as many troubles as the woods have leaves, all intolerable." At the bottom of the hill Ceres, with 4 nymphs in a harvest cart, met the Queen and sang a song in her honour. James I. also stayed at Bisham, 29th August, 1616. In his accounts charity is again put down as *iiii*^s.

I do not think any other of the Hoby family attained much distinction, though a Baronetcy was conferred upon it. Sir Philip Hoby, Dean of Ardfert was the last male member. He died unmarried in 1766, when the estate went to Sir John Mill, Bart., who took the name of Hoby. The Mills had an estate in Sussex, and probably did not care much about Bisham, which property was sold in 1780 to George Vansittart. There are many Hobys in America, and some in the Cape, who claim connection with the Bisham branch.

As regards the fabric of the Abbey, there have been differences of opinion. It has been asserted that the earliest portions date from the reign of Stephen, whilst other authorities have attributed almost the whole of the building to the Hobys. It needs no long inspection to convince the visitor that the hall, the Council Chamber, the porch, the rooms on the left of the porch, and probably part of the offices are of much older date than the 16th century. And I may mention that in recent alterations in the offices work of early date has been found. One architect (a specialist in Monastic work) explained to me that the building is of a form common to Monastic establishments, viz., a dormitory for the monks, another for the lay brothers, and a common living room between the dormitories. The shape of the building bears out this theory, but the great east window of the hall does not. So apparently the Council Chamber may be of later date than the west side. This window was bricked up and covered with plaster in order to make the Council Chamber wall. When the hall was restored by Mr. Vansittart this window (said to be 13th century at the latest) was discovered. Mr. Silver, who carried out the restoration, tells us that glass was found in the window. In the spandril over the left mullion was found on a plaster surface a painting, distinctly traceable, of the head of St. Peter with his keys. This painting was reproduced line for line by the architect. We have now, thanks to Mr. Powell, information about the house in 1552, the surveyor's description of it at that date being published with Sir Thos. Hoby's diary. The Abbey, it states, adjoins "the site of the late Monastery builded partly of timber and covered with

tiles, wherein is contained a hall with a chimney, and at the lower end of the same is a pantery, a buttern, a kechyne, a larder and a little woodyarde. At the over end of the same, ascending by a fayre half pace, is a great chamber with an inner and vi. other chambers and logging upon a quadrante, and underneath these chambers at the foot of the said half pace is a wine cellar and a quadrante cloyster with certayne small loggings on every side of the same." The survey also refers to the sale of the late Monastery there, whereof is standing the late Prior's lodgings "sette between the Thames and the mancon house of the late Countess of Sarum, wherein is a lytell halle, a parloure within the same, a small ketchyn and a pretty pantery with iv. chambers over the same; also a garden plotte lying between the said kechyn, the late Prior's lodgings and the malting house. Also the Churchyard and soyle where the Abbey Church and hall late stode, being now altogether defaced. Also certain lodgings parcell of the scite of the late Monastery standing on the north part of the court before the hall door." There were also a dovehouse and a convent garden. These disappeared, except the dovecote. Some monuments were brought from the Church to the Abbey hall; those of the King maker and Lord Montagu remained in the hall till the middle of the 18th century, but disappeared before the Vansittart time, said to have been removed when the screen under the gallery was put up. It is recorded that an agent of Weldon (who held some of the premises on lease) carried away from the Monastery some of the ceilings and "x deors with lokkes." Mr. Powell points out that the house then consisted of the hall, Council Chamber, and a cloister forming a square to the east, one side of which exists. To these should be added the rooms on the west of the porch and the offices, in which, however, alterations have been made. It appears the Hobys pulled down the cloisters and the Prior's lodgings and used the materials for the additions north of the hall. There are still about the grounds stones with carved work, and whenever we have altered the walls we have found such work, belonging, no doubt, to the Church and other destroyed buildings. Mr. Powell thinks that Sir Thomas Hoby is responsible for the rooms on the south side of the hall. But the window lately discovered in the tapestry room points to an earlier date, though the rooms just beyond and the passage where the coins were found are later. In Sir Thomas' diary are notes about the new buildings. 1557: "My brother" tooke his journey towards Evesham. I remained at home to see his new buildings go forward.

1557, 12th July : I came to Bisham with my wief, there to remain.
 1560 : This yere was the turret built at Bisham." Mr. Powell considers this means the whole tower (of which there is no mention in the survey), though turret is hardly applicable to the whole of the tower. "1561 : The new lodgings at Bisham finished. 1562 : The garden and orchard planted and the gallery made with nobleman's arms."

The house has not been much altered since Sir Thomas Hoby's time, though restorations and modern improvements in the way of gas, heating and bath rooms have been made. The changes in the hall are worth notice. I have already referred to the east window. There were also found (1859) on the north side adjoining the dining room 3 hoods said to have contained 5 lancet windows a-piece (now walled up), and the same arrangement existed on the south side till the erection of the chimney (before which time the smoke of the fire went out at a louvre in the roof). Dormer windows took their place. The hall at one time had a ceiling which hid the whole pitch, turning its real stateliness into comparative meanness. The oak panelling was painted with a pink colour. The restoration of the hall originated in the fact that a dormer window required repair. In course of repairs the oak roof was discovered in a wonderful state of preservation. [Each timber 11 ins. by 9 ins. thick, and 35 ft. long. Some in the centre discoloured by smoke]. The dormer windows were accordingly removed, and to provide the necessary light two windows (designed by the Rev. T. E. Powell) were placed over the gallery, a window being also placed over the old east window. There are many other points of interest, such as the secret room, the Bisham ghost, the tapestry, the stained glass in the Council room, the gold coins, the secret passage, and the outbuildings, which I would fain touch on, but time obliges me to bring this paper to a close with an expression of the great pleasure Lady Vansittart Neale and I feel in welcoming you to this house.

Proceedings of Societies.

BERKS ARCHÆOLOGICAL SOCIETY.—A beautifully designed illuminated Address has been sent to King George V. by the Berkshire Archæological Society, requesting his Majesty to graciously consent to be a Patron of the Society, as the late King Edward and Queen Victoria were in the past. The Address, which is executed in Mr. W. H. Pountney's charming style bears the signatures of Mr. Charles E. Keyser, the President; the Rev. P. H. Ditchfield,