

Proceedings of the Society, 1877.

THE Annual Meeting of the Society was held on August 1st at Oxford, by invitation from Mr. E. J. Payne, a member of the Society and a fellow of University College. Special arrangements having been made for the excursion, the members and their friends started from Aylesbury by the 9.20 a.m. train, viâ Princes Risborough and Thame. On arriving at Oxford, the party proceeded to the Castle mound, where they were met by Mr. E. J. Payne and Mr. James Parker, and other friends. Having ascended the mound, Mr. Parker gave a general historical account of the city of Oxford, or Oxenford, from its earliest days. The mound probably dates from the year A.D. 912, and was erected for observation, and as a defence against the Danes. These marauders, in their early excursions invariably followed the course of rivers, and it was not until their second and third invasion that they penetrated so far inland as Oxford. It then became necessary to protect the river Thames and its several tributaries, and for that purpose two places were chosen for fortification, London and Oxford, the latter being looked upon as an important central post, and around it naturally sprung up the city. Oxford was the royal residence of the Saxon Monarchs, and three of them are recorded to have died there, Edward the Elder, Edward Ironside, and the first Harold. Referring to the Danes, it appeared that in the great massacre of them on November 13th, A.D. 1002, in the reign of Ethelred, a number of them took refuge in the then existing tower of St. Frideswide's church, and that the tower was then destroyed by fire, while subsequently the Danes under Sweyn, King of Denmark, came and took their revenge by subduing the Saxons and burning the city. A Witena-gemote, or great council of the nation, was held at Oxford, which decided that Harold should have all the country north of the Thames, with London for his capital city, and that Hardicanute should have all the south. The effect which this decision of the council had upon the fate of England was, that Harold, having defeated his rebel brother Tosti at Stamford Bridge, met William the Norman, who with his followers had landed at Pevensey, and fought a battle at Hastings, when he himself was killed, the Saxon dynasty completely overthrown, and the Norman power established in the country. Coming to the Norman Conquest we find, on the authority of Matthew Paris, that Oxford was besieged, but the original ancient record examined by Mr. Parker shows the siege to have been at "Ex" (Exeter), instead of "Ox" (Oxford), and that consequently there was no siege of Oxford at all at that time. The first Norman governor appointed to Oxford by William the Conqueror was Robert de Oili, D'oili, or D'oyley, as his name is variously spelt, who is the generally accepted founder of the Castle. He also erected a church called St. George's, and founded a college of priests in the Castle, also other churches with a similar tower in the Northgate, and other parts of the city; one of these was St. Aldate's, who was a manufactured saint, no such person appearing ever to have existed. After some further remarks, Mr. Parker showed the visitors, on descending the mound, the old well beneath it, and the old Norman crypt, of the latter part of the eleventh century, under the church of St. George. With the exception of the tower, the church has been destroyed. He then led them by D'Oyley's mill, which is mentioned in the Domesday Survey as existing at that time, pointed out part of the original city wall, and finally brought them out into St. Aldate's, and thence to Christ Church Cathedral.

Mr. PARKER spoke of the past history and recent restorations of this building from the foundation of the nunnery dedicated originally to St. Frideswide, by whom it was founded. St. Frideswide was the daughter of a certain Saxon King, who was desirous on her father's death of retiring from the world, partly to escape an obnoxious suitor. She founded this nunnery, which was more educational than ecclesiastical in its original character and design. The foundation was supposed to have been in 708, and from subsequent bequests it became an important institution. The history of St. Frideswide is represented in one of the ancient stained glass windows. The story of the sainted Saxon princess as thus depicted seems to have been rather singular, as in one of the compartments she appears in a pigstye, praying, while in another she is fleeing from the pursuit of an armed party. The colouring is rich, and there is much vigour in the action and grouping of the various figures. The institution which St. Frideswide founded as a nunnery afterwards changed hands, and became in the year 1220 a monastery, first for seculars and afterwards for regulars. Attention was called to the architectural differences in various details of St. Frideswide's Church, with the remains of the old nave, transepts, and niches of the choir, dating from 1180 to 1196, while Christ Church Chapter House and other portions were of a more recent period. Mr. Parker eulogized, as an example worthy to be followed, the close manner in which some restorations made in the fourteenth century had been carried out by the mediæval architect, upon the lines of the preceding buildings, the lesson so taught being that the true object of restoration ought to be preservation. The Cathedral having been visited, and its leading architectural features described, the party made its way into the Chapter House, and examined the interesting series of historical portraits, including those of Henry VIII. and his two daughters, and of several divines connected with the past history of the Cathedral. Thence issuing into the adjacent Christ Church meadow, after a passing glance at the Broad Walk, they were cordially welcomed within the precincts of Merton College. The edifices previously examined were of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, while Merton furnished fine examples of the early decorated and decorated styles of the thirteenth and fourteenth. The foundation of Merton College was due to Walter de Merton, who originally brought a certain number of students to Oxford, who, in the first instance, were located in hall. The original statutes of the Warden and Fellows of Merton formed the basis for those of all the subsequent colleges but it is remarkable that they were more liberal and less ecclesiastical in their character. The earliest portion of Merton was the choir, commenced in 1280, and which was successively followed by the college treasury in 1285, the vestry in 1310, the library in 1349, and the tower to the second story in 1424. The library, which was one of the most interesting objects in Merton, had apparently originally constituted a series of cells for study, the arrangement of the windows clearly pointing to such a design. Mr. Parker pointed out the various objects of interest, and then the society passed on to University College, where the kind hospitality of Mr. E. J. Payne, formerly of Wycombe, one of the fellows, had provided a liberal and welcome luncheon in the library, to which due justice was done.

Mr. PAYNE rose and shortly addressed the meeting. He said the Master and Fellows of University College were landowners in Buckinghamshire, and he was himself a native of the same county. It gave him great pleasure to see members of the Archæological and Architectural Society of the County of Bucks, and to welcome them in the interesting city of Oxford and in his own college. He then vacated his seat in favour of the Rev. H. Bull, of Lathbury, who proceeded to hold

THE ANNUAL MEETING.

The Rev. H. BULL, after a brief reference to his own connection with Oxford, called attention to the business before the meeting, the first thing being the election of their officers. The whole, as they appeared in the programme, were all re-elected.

The Rev. C. LOWNDES, as Treasurer, then read the annual statement of accounts, by which it appeared that the income for the past year was £45 13s. subscriptions, and that there was a balance due to the treasurer of £10 0s. 9d. The accounts had been audited, and the Rev. C. Lowndes said the Society was solvent if the members would pay up their subscriptions. The accounts were then passed, and Mr. J. E. Bartlett and Mr. T. Horwood were appointed auditors. Three new members were proposed—the Rev. A. Riddle, Rev. R. Chilton, and S. Salter, Esq., all of whom were duly elected.

The Rev. H. BULL said he had a pleasing task to perform, that of acknowledging the kindness of Mr. Payne, to whom they were indebted for the entertainment of that day. Mr. Payne, as a fellow of University College, sent them an invitation to visit Oxford, and they were very grateful for the opportunity, and delighted to accept it. Some of the company present had probably seen little or nothing of Oxford before, and he was sure that they must have received a most pleasing impression of it from the able descriptions given them by their friend Mr. Parker. Others might have been over some of the colleges with persons ordinarily called “touts,” from whom they would not learn a great deal. He was sure they all felt much indebted to Mr. Payne for his kindness and hospitality, and for the handsome and liberal manner in which he had entertained them. They returned him their best thanks.

Mr. PAYNE thanked them cordially for the compliment, and said they had been indebted not so much to him as to Mr. James Parker for the pleasure which that visit to Oxford had given them. Mr. Parker’s learning and ability were well known, and no man had given more time and thought to the history of their ancient city, or was better acquainted with it. He proposed that a cordial and unanimous vote of thanks be given to Mr. Parker for the services he had rendered them that day.

Mr. BULL, having alluded to the kind, clear, and lucid way in which Mr. Parker had explained the various places visited, seconded the resolution, which was carried by acclamation.

Mr. PARKER said he was much obliged for the honour done him. They had returned him more thanks than the little he had done merited at their hands. It gave him great pleasure to meet them and give them any information in his power. He was a member of the old Oxford Architectural Society, which claimed the honour of being the first kindred Society in the kingdom, and he could look back for thirty or forty years on the work of that society. He believed that a great deal of the architectural improvements which had been witnessed in Oxford were due to that society, and that at the same time the excellent manner in which recent works of Church restoration had been carried out in Buckinghamshire was due to the Bucks Society. He should feel great pleasure if anything he could do would encourage the continuance of the same good work. He suggested that as it was already four o’clock, and there was much more to be seen, no further time should be lost.

The company then rose, and first visited University Chapel and inspected the carvings of the oak screen and cedar wainscoat which encloses the altar. The old Flemish windows were also inspected, and their colouring pointed out by Mr. Payne. The company then proceeded to the Chapel

of All Souls College, the great object of interest being the magnificent restored reredos. The original was erected in the year 1430, the conditions of the bequest made for that purpose being that prayers should be said for the souls of King Henry V. and the English earls and barons who were slain in the wars in France, sculptured representations of whom were placed in the niches. The reredos was damaged by the Puritans, who defaced these figures, but it was questionable if they did so much injury as the subsequent restorations in the time of Charles the Second, when all the projecting parts of the figures were sawn off to make a plain surface. These projections were easily restored by Sir Gilbert Scott; and as Mr. Parker pointed out its leading features, it was impossible to avoid coming to the same conclusion as he did, that the work was one of the grandest specimens of sculptured architecture to be found, not merely in Oxford, but anywhere else. The new work can be easily distinguished from the old, and it is a work which must be seen to be appreciated. A somewhat hurried inspection of New College Chapel, also Worcester College Hall, and Library, was then made, which brought the very interesting and instructive excursion to a close, time not permitting further exploration of those glorious structures which must ever render Oxford the most interesting of English cities to the architectural and archæological student. The party left Oxford by the six p.m. train, having spent a delightful and profitable day, and wishing the remaining part of the programme may be perfected on a future occasion.

The members of the Society are greatly indebted to Messrs. James Parker and E. J. Payne, who spared no trouble or labour in advancing the objects of the meeting.