

Proceedings of the Society, 1878.

THE Annual Meeting of the Society was held on Monday, July 22nd, at Wooburn House, the seat of Alfred Gilbey, Esq., one of the Members of the Society. The programme for the Excursion was so attractive, that a large number of members and their friends availed themselves of Mr. Gilbey's proffered hospitality, and of the opportunity of visiting the most interesting and picturesque part of South Bucks. They left Aylesbury, by the Great Western Railway, at 9.20 a.m., and arrived at Bourne End at 10.20. Here they entered the carriages which were waiting, and drove through Hedsor Park, the seat of Lord Boston, to the bottom of the hill. Alighting, and ascending the hill on foot, they halted opposite a gigantic yew-tree, twenty-seven feet in girth, when the Rev. G. M. Robins, rector of Hedsor, read the following account of it, given to him by Lord Boston, for the truth of which he would not vouch:—

“The yews of the Abbey of Fountains are more than twelve centuries old; the yew at Partingale, in Perthshire, is more than twice that age; but the Brabourne yew, in Kent, is supposed to be three thousand years of age; and probably that of Hedsor, in Buckinghamshire, is three hundred years older still. In other words, the Hedsor yew was planted when Hercules had scarcely emerged in the Greek mythology, and existed before Homer and the taking of Troy.”

Then they moved on to Hedsor Church, and, on the way, stopped on a knoll of the hill to gaze upon a magnificent panorama of the Thames Valley. Hedsor Church, dedicated to St. Nicholas, is said to have been rebuilt by Roland Hynde, who presented to the living in 1575, but certainly only in part, as some portions are evidently of an earlier date. In the chancel the windows have some remains of old stained glass, illustrative of Scripture history. Close to the church is the site of a minor ecclesiastical building, supposed to have been attached to Burnham Abbey; the only remains are an early English capital and a broken shaft. Walking on to Hedsor House, the members inspected the interior, which contains some valuable pictures, an elegant clock, presented, in the year 1690, to Lord Boston, Ambassador at Constantinople, by the Sultan of Turkey, and an old illustrated Bible, with the lids inlaid with medallions, presented by the University of Cambridge to Henry, Earl of Holland, when he was Chancellor of Cambridge. From the house the members walked through the gardens, and, crossing the road, entered the grounds of Cliveden, the property of the Duke of Westminster. Arriving at a summer-house, the Secretary read the following account from the *Gardeners' Chronicle*:—

“Cliveden estate occupies an elevated plateau on the chalk some three hundred acres in extent. It lies a few miles distant from Taplow and Maidenhead, and is bounded by the Taplow Court, Dropmore, and Hedsor estates, and for a great part of its extent by the river Thames. On the one side is a steep cliff overhanging the river richly draped with clematis,

and where the sinuous roots of aged yews hang on for very life, like so many pythons. On the other sides are woods, rich, deep, glorious, pierced with openings to let in the distant views, and traversed by green paths and noble avenues. Between the two are spacious lawns surrounding the mansion, with its terraces, greenhouses, fruit-houses, and other offices. Cliveden was built by George Villiers, the profligate Duke of Buckingham, the friend of Charles II., a man whose character has been sketched by many, from Dryden to Macaulay, but never in clearer outline than by the first-named, who speaks of Buckingham as—

‘ A man so various that he seemed to be
Not one, but all mankind’s epitome :
Stiff in opinion, always in the wrong,
Was everything by fits, and nothing long ;
But in the course of one revolving moon
Was chemist, statesman, fiddler, and buffoon ;
Then all for women, painting, rhyming, drinking,
Beside a thousand freaks that died in thinking.’

Pope refers to the same versatile profligate in some lines commemorative of one of the many incidents of his career, and wherein mention is specially made of—

‘ Cliveden’s proud alcove,
The abode of wanton Shrewsbury and of love,’

in allusion to the intrigue of the Duke and the Countess of Shrewsbury. The Countess was as unprincipled as the Duke himself, if not worse, for it is recorded of her that, in the guise of a page, she held the Duke’s horse while he killed her husband in a duel—a story we should be glad, for the credit of human nature, if some historian of the future would kindly prove to be untrue.

“ Poetical justice, however, has befallen Buckingham in more senses than one, as witness the following lines relating to him :—

‘ Mark where in ruins lies the last retreat of motley Villiers.

* * * * *
Here sunk in sorrow and deprived of all,
They saw him greatly live and meanly fall.’
* * * * *

‘ In the worst inn’s worst room, with mat half hung,
The floors of plaster, and the walls of dung,
On once a flock bed, but repaired with straw,
With tape-tyed curtains never meant to draw,
The George and Garter dangling from that bed,
Where tawdry yellow strove with dirty red,
Great Villiers lies.’

The poets have, we suspect, secured a longer, or at least a more widely spread, remembrance to this unprincipled man (who died in 1688) than the historians could have done

“ The mansion was added to by the first Earl of Orkney, who occupied it until 1735. Frederick, Prince of Wales, occupied it until 1756, and it was during his tenancy that a poet and a musician contributed to encourage and stimulate the patriotic feelings of Britons as much—nay, much more—than the treacheries and faithlessness of Buckingham served to humiliate and depress them, for it was in a chambered vault underneath the dining-room at Cliveden that it was first authoritatively pronounced (in 1740) that ‘ Britannia rules the waves,’ and that ‘ Britons never will be slaves’—the occasion being the performance, for the first time, of the

'Masque of Liberty,' written by James Thomson, and containing the now well-known song, set to music by Dr. Arne.

"Villiers's house was burnt in 1795, owing to the carelessness of a maid-servant addicted to the practice of novel reading in bed. The estate was purchased by Sir George Warrender, in 1822 or 1823, and the mansion was rebuilt by him in 1830. In 1849 it was purchased by the late Duke of Sutherland, and shared the fate of its predecessor in November of the same year. The present mansion was completed in 1851, in the Italian style. It was designed by Sir Charles Barry for the late Duke of Sutherland, to whom, as to the fine taste of the late Duchess, much of the beauty of Cliveden is due. The property was purchased by the Duke of Westminster in 1869, and since his occupation many improvements have been carried out. The terrace front is nearly 400 feet in length and 26 feet in width, and overlooks a noble sward bedecked with flower-beds, and which is reached by a handsome flight of steps, gracefully and naturally draped with climbers. The entrance front of the mansion on the opposite side is recessed, somewhat after the fashion of Versailles. On one side is an elegant campanile, and near it, but screened from view, are the various offices, and the forcing-houses and vineries, etc. On the opposite side of the mansion are the conservatories and glazed corridors, the former not in keeping with the rest of the building, and destined probably to be replaced by a structure more in consonance with the fine proportions and elegant design of the mansion, and with the requirements of its inmates."

Strolling through the beautiful grounds of Cliveden, and looking at a cedar of Lebanon brought by Mr. Disraeli from the Holy Land, and presented to the Duchess of Sutherland, the former possessor of this magnificent estate, the party entered and were shown over the mansion, and afterwards walked through the gardens to the Duke's fishing cottage, where they partook of an excellent luncheon provided by A. Gilbey, Esq. They then proceeded to Hitcham Church. The pillars of the chancel arch are evidently Norman, and the windows contain specimens of old stained glass. There are some monuments and fine brasses of the sixteenth century; one of the former blocks up the sedilia, but the rector, the Rev. J. Frewer, will remove it at his own cost. The key of the church, of the time of Edward III., was found in the library of Eton College, in whose gift the living is; the wards of the key represent the form of the capital letter E.

The ruins of Burnham Abbey were next visited. They are in a very dilapidated condition, but very interesting. W. L. Rutton, Esq., C.E., exhibited a plan of the ruins, and gave an epitome of an elaborate paper he had prepared on them. This paper will be printed in the next number of the RECORDS OF BUCKINGHAMSHIRE. From Burnham Abbey the party proceeded to Burnham Church. Here the Archdeacon of Buckingham read a paper, written by a Mr. Webster in 1809, taken chiefly from the histories of the county. He also read a paper by S. Christie-Miller, Esq., churchwarden, giving a description of several restorations since the year 1848.

Leaving Burnham, the members drove to the celebrated "Burnham Beeches," a spot resorted to by every lover of woodland scenery. The old "Beeches" are of immense girth, and have all been "pollarded." The tenants of the adjoining lands, where not one tree is "pollarded," were bound by their leases not to cut or lop any tree except pollards. But the land on which the "Beeches" grow, being a common of about four hundred acres, and coal being scarce, the trees, amongst which were some oaks, were probably "pollarded" by or for the benefit of the surrounding cottagers. Here, also, the remains of a Roman camp, with its vallum, about an acre in extent, was visited.

Emerging from the "Beeches," the members drove through the beautiful park of Dropmore, celebrated for the variety and growth of trees from all quarters of the globe, especially the *Araucaria imbricata*. Thence they proceeded to Wooburn Church, which has been fully described by the Rev. A. B. Ashley in the RECORDS OF BUCKINGHAMSHIRE, vol. iv., page 16, and upon which Mr. Ashley read a paper afterwards at the annual meeting. The short distance from the church to Wooburn House, the seat of Alfred Gilbey, Esq., was soon passed over, and the members found themselves seated at the hospitable table of A. Gilbey, Esq.

After dinner, A. Gilbey, Esq., rose, and proposed "The health of the Queen and the rest of the Royal Family." This toast is always heartily received by every Englishman, and this day they had almost been within the shadow of Windsor Castle, and therefore they ought not to pass over the loyal toast. The toast was followed by a verse of the National Anthem.

A. Gilbey, Esq., again rose, and said, "This house was formerly a palace of the Bishops of Lincoln, and therefore the toast of the Bishop and Clergy of the Diocese was particularly appropriate. With it he would couple the name of the Archdeacon of Buckingham."

The Ven. Archdeacon Purey-Cust, in returning thanks, said they had been reminded that their place of meeting had formerly been the residence of the Bishops of Lincoln, and the clergy might therefore well be found taking part in the proceedings of that most enjoyable day. These meetings always brought back some pleasant memories. They saw some beautiful country, and formed associations with old friends and neighbours. They had seen that day many interesting and beautiful places, and they were now assembled round the hospitable board of their good friend Mr. Gilbey. He felt that this certainly was one of the days and occasions in which the clergy ought to participate, and which always repaid them for the few hours the excursion occupied. He hoped and trusted that what they had seen with their eyes would be developed in their minds during the ensuing year, for such expeditions were not merely the going out for a day's pleasure, but for instruction in archæology and architecture. After enlarging further upon the usefulness of such gatherings, and congratulating the secretary upon the admirable papers which he and the Society had been the means of bringing out, he concluded by expressing his hope that the Society, which had done much good in the past, would long continue to do the same useful work in the future.

Mr. Du Pré proposed the next toast, "The health of their excellent host, Mr. Gilbey, whose unbounded hospitality had done so much to add to the pleasure of their meeting, and who had received them in so admirable a manner." He adverted to the former history of the house they were in as having been the residence of the Bishop of Lincoln, and also of the Duke of Wharton. It was now the abode of their worthy host, who had bestowed upon it an amount of care and expenditure which was certainly most grateful to himself (Mr. Du Pré) as the present proprietor of it.

Mr. Gilbey, in responding, gave the company a short account of how he chanced to settle down in that part of the county, which was owing to the representations of their worthy Vicar, which in the first instance brought him down to see Wooburn House, and the kind reception he had from Mr. Du Pré completed his determination to remain there. He assured them that it gave him the greatest possible pleasure to receive the Bucks Archæological Society there that day, and he hoped he should attend many more of its meetings; and should they again hold their meetings in that part of the county, he should be equally delighted as he was at the present to see them again at Wooburn.

The Archdeacon proposed "The health of the Secretary," the Rev. C.

Lowndes, whose labours in the cause of archæology in Bucks he warmly eulogized.

Mr. Lowndes, in reply, said he had now been secretary for the last twenty years, and he had been in hopes of retiring, but should continue to hold that office for another year. One great reason why he liked the meetings of that Society was, that they brought friends together. They were now about to hold the Annual Meeting, and he called upon Mr. Du Pré to take the chair for that purpose.

Mr. Du Pré having done so, the first business done was the unanimous re-election of all the vice-presidents, the honorary secretary, the treasurer, and the auditors.

Mr. Lowndes, as treasurer, said he had now 3s. 6d. in hand, which was better than last year, when he was 10*l.* out of pocket, owing to arrears of subscriptions, which had during the year been collected.

The following new members, who had been proposed and seconded in due course at a committee meeting, were now admitted—Sir Philip Rose, Rayners; Rev. W. E. Mallaher, Weson Turville; Mr. T. Wild, Chalfont St. Giles; Mr. H. E. Friend, High Street, Wycombe; W. Booth, Esq., Stone; A. Vernon, Esq., Wycombe; Rev. J. Robertson, Great Marlow; G. Fell, Esq., Aylesbury.

The Rev. F. B. Ashley, vicar of Wooburn, then read a paper on Wooburn Church, which will be printed in the next number of the RECORDS.

The Chairman proposed the health of Mr. Ashley, who briefly replied.

Some rubbings of brasses, relics, and Roman coins were then exhibited, and the company broke up for the neighbouring railway station at Wooburn Green, and thence took train for Aylesbury.
