



## Excursions of the Society.

### VISIT TO WANTAGE.



ON Thursday, May 27th, an excursion, arranged by Members of the Berks Archæological and Architectural Society, was made to Wantage. Among those forming the party were the Rev. J. M. Guilding, the Rev. P. H. Ditchfield, Professor Blake, Mr. Rutland (Maidenhead), Mr. Goolden (Cookham), Mr. and Mrs. R. Hart, Miss Butler, etc.

Lunch having been partaken of at the Bear Hotel, the party went to the parish church of S.S. Peter and Paul, where they were met by the Rev. T. H. Archer Houblon (Vicar of Wantage), the Rev. E. R. Gardener (Vicar of Fawley, near Wantage), Mr. Jotcham, and several other gentlemen. The many points of interest in the beautiful church, such as the nave, the exquisite stone and wood carving, the magnificent windows, the ancient plate, &c., were described by the Rev. E. R. Gardener (who read a paper on the history of the church), also by the Vicar, and the Rev. J. M. Guilding, and Mr. Jotcham.

Mr. GARDENER, in the course of his paper, said the church was originally designed to have a nave and transepts only without aisles. This was shown by the external turret leading up to the tower being now within the church, and by the traces of the old nave wall which abutted against it. Whether the nave was completed after this design or only commenced there was no evidence to show. The largest pillars supporting the central tower could scarcely be of an earlier age than the early part of Henry III., but the arches of the nave with their pillars and capitals were more advanced in style and belonged either to Edward I., or at the earliest to the close of Henry III.'s reign. Other changes must have taken place in the reigns of Edward I. and Edward II., and alterations in the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries, evidently for the sake of enlargement, had destroyed much of the original work. In its general

design the chancel was of the fifteenth or sixteenth centuries. The east window was modern, an early example of Street. Baptismal and Marriage Registers commenced October 23, 1538, Burials 1542. A description was given of the Fitzwarrin, Gedding, and Wilmot monuments.

#### MEETING AT THE TOWN HALL.

Mr. H. J. REID, F.S.A., had been announced to read a paper on "The history of the town and hundred of Wantage," at the Town Hall, in the afternoon, but unfortunately he was prevented from personally attending owing to the sudden illness of his son. His place was taken at the last moment by the Rev. J. M. Guilding, to whom Mr. Reid had sent some unfinished notes on the subject he had intended to speak upon. The Town Hall was crowded, many of the leading inhabitants of the town and neighbourhood and ladies being present.

The VICAR of WANTAGE presided, and in opening the proceedings apologised for the absence of Mr. P. Wroughton, M.P., and Mr. W. S. Silver (of Letcombe Regis), both of whom he said took great interest in the work of the Society. He begged, on behalf of the town, to heartily extend a very warm welcome to the Members of the Society. It would be difficult to exaggerate the benefits which such a society conferred on the districts which they covered, and he dwelt on the interest which was evoked in the work of the past by the study of history. At Wantage they had memories to treasure, and after hearing the address they were about to listen to, he hoped and believed they would be better able to read aright the history of the past and more able to appreciate that which now remained in their midst.

The Rev. P. H. DITCHFIELD thanked the Chairman and those present for the kind way in which they had received the Society. It was thought that by visiting the towns of interest in the county in this way they would stir up fresh enthusiasm amongst the inhabitants, and he trusted such meetings, like the one recently held at Wokingham, would be successful.

The Rev. J. M. GUILDING, before commencing to read the paper, said it was the result of the researches of a very accurate, very painstaking, and a very accomplished antiquary, and it was a matter of extreme regret to him that they were debarred the privilege of having Mr. Reid to deliver it himself. With regard to their parish church Mr. Guilding said it had no rival in the county, and had very few rivals in the diocese of Oxford, and he also remarked on

the many noble families with which Wantage had been associated in times past. It was a singular circumstance that the earliest mention he had been able to find of Wantage in ancient documents was in the will of Alfred the Great, who was said to have been born in the town. By that will, which according to Mr. J. M. Kemble was dated from 880 to 885, Alfred, who designated himself King of the West Saxons, bequeathed with other places Lamburnham, Waneting, and Athandune, to his wife Ealhswide. Wantage was subsequently mentioned in a grant of Eadwig, to Eadwold, of X Mausas, at Drayton, and the boundaries of the land were carefully set out, Waneting being mentioned in it. This grant was in the Castulary of Abingdon Monastery, which even at that date had been in existence over 200 years. There were several interesting documents connected with King Alfred, and tradition told them naturally far more. Whether, as Dr. Wise so strongly asserted and believed, there was a Saxon palace at Wantage, in which King Alfred was born, was questionable. In the first place they had yet to learn that the Saxon Kings lived in palaces. Alfred had but little leisure for regal splendour, he being so busily occupied. He certainly owned the Manor of Wantage, and possibly lived on it in the King's house, which was probably little better than those of his nobles, and these were of the most simple description. In the time of Dr. Wise there was far too great a straining of names to fit a purpose. Some details were given with regard to the supposed palace of King Alfred. That Wantage was a Royal place belonging to that monarch was sufficiently shown. With that let them be content, and give their admiration to that king, as one who truly loved his country, who strove and fought to improve the condition of his people, and to drive out the invader. Let them remember him as a scholar, for he translated *Æsop*; he was a soldier and a reformer. Wantage might be proud of having given birth to such an able king, but they must at the same time remember he did not do all that was attributed to him. He did not divide the lands into hundreds or into counties; such division had been made long before. Neither did he originate trial by jury, but to him might be unquestionably traced the practical application of many principles of the modern law. Alfred died in the year 900, and was buried at Farringdon, near Winchester. Wantage appeared, at the death of Ealhswide, to have reverted to the Crown, no charter being extant relating to its disposal otherwise, and at the Conquest it was still a Royal Manor. Wantage seemed to have finally been alienated by the Crown in the reign of Richard

I., for it appeared in that reign to belong to William Valence, Earl of Pembroke, who obtained it as a gift from Baldwin de Betun, Earl of Albemarle. In the year 1215 it passed to Fulk Fitzwarine, a Norman knight, in which family it remained, descending by heir male for several generations. In the 17th century it came into the hands of the D'Oyleys.

Mr. JOTCHAM said he was sure they were all deeply indebted to Mr. Guilding for the address they had just listened to. He criticised some parts of Mr. Reid's paper, and said that until they found very good evidence to the contrary they should continue to believe that King Alfred was born at Wantage and lived there. They in Wantage had deep and abiding reverence for the past, and they were very proud of the associations surrounding them.

The Rev. P. H. DITCHFIELD proposed a hearty vote of thanks to the Vicar of Wantage for the great kindness he had shown them that day and the interest and trouble he had evinced in the arrangements. They hoped to some day have a complete history of the town and neighbourhood of Wantage.

The CHAIRMAN suitably replied, and after accepting the invitation of Mr. Houblon to tea, at the Vicarage, the Reading contingent left the town at 6.5, reaching their destination at 8.50.

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The next Excursion of the Society will be made on July 16th and its destination will be the district of the Vale of the White Horse, which abounds in objects of antiquarian interest. Our committee has accepted the invitation of the Oxfordshire Society to join with their members in this excursion, which will, therefore, be the joint excursion of the two Societies.

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The Abbey Gateway will soon be in a state of readiness for the accommodation of our members. It was found that many repairs and alterations had to be made, and the Corporation has put the rooms in a thorough state of restoration. We shall soon hope to be able to move our head-quarters to the building which has been placed at the disposal of the Society by the kindness of the Mayor and Corporation of Reading.