

## NOTES

**HIGH WYCOMBE: *Roman Villa.*** As reported on page 48 of the present volume, the Ministry of Works carried out a very complete excavation of the site with most satisfactory and interesting results. An account of the work was promised for the *Records*; and this issue has been held up for almost a year in the hope of publishing it. But so far not a word has been received from the Ministry's excavator. The finds are largely to be divided between the High Wycombe Museum and the Aylesbury Museum. The site is now completely destroyed, and the new swimming-bath—not nearly so decorative one may say as the Roman Bath House—is in the course of erection.

***Ruins of St. John Baptist's Hospital.*** The uphill battle with unsympathetic local authorities who appear to have no sense of history or culture continues. The latest threat is to the twelfth- and thirteenth-century ruins of the hall and adjacent buildings of the medieval Hospital of St. John the Baptist in Easton Street. These are the only surviving remains of such a building in the whole county, and were the origin of the Grammar School after the Suppression. The local council wishes to demolish the buildings and make a car park on the site, and is unwilling to produce the £500 needed to put the ruins in good order. Our Society and the Council for the Preservation of Rural England have the matter in hand and vigorous representations are being made.

**PADBURY: *Wall-paintings in St. Mary's Church.*** After the dismal catalogue above, of demolitions, closures and other threats, it is pleasant to record a discovery which can *add* something to the county's treasures instead of subtracting from them. Wall-paintings have been known in the church for fifty years and have steadily deteriorated through lack of treatment and interest. It was also clear that others were awaiting uncovering, and I had been trying vainly for thirty years to get something done about them. With the advent of Canon Rich, this seemed likely. But on his resignation matters are uncertain again. Accordingly, it may be wise to print an extract from the report I prepared after an inspection made at Canon Rich's invitation:

"The north, east and west walls of the nave have been stripped of their plaster exposing the rough rubble stonework that was never meant to be seen. All painting that may have existed in these areas has therefore been destroyed.

"The chancel and the south aisle appear to have been replastered at a late date, the latter possibly in 1764 when the roof was repaired or renewed. At any rate, the plaster is of a different character to that elsewhere in the church, and is not so heavily coated with lime-wash; and I found no trace of painting of any date in the areas I examined. Luckily such mural memorial tablets as the church possesses are all in the south aisle and not the north.

"The north aisle contains paintings at the east end that have been exposed without any sort of care or treatment for between fifty and seventy years. And in the central and western sections portions of painting have been unskilfully uncovered piecemeal, and greatly confused by the operators having gone through several superimposed layers.

"At the East end of the aisle, on the north wall, are three main subjects:

"1. (a) (above at extreme east end). A scene from the Life of St. Catherine of

Alexandria—the saint shown between two wheels in the presence of the Emperor Maximin.

"(b) (below the preceding). Very badly defaced, but from evidence of old descriptions (*Royal Commission on Historical Monuments, Bucks., North Volume, 1913*) and E. W. Tristram, *English Wall Painting of the Fourteenth Century*, and my own early notes, the scene was evidently that of St. Catherine disputing with the Philosophers before the Emperor. The series is terminated by a deep scroll band just below the level of the apex of the tomb recess arch.

"2. West of both these is a large wheel in black, with figures in red representing the Seven Deadly Sins or the Purging of Pride. There was a central figure, that of Pride, being pierced by Death's dart; and from the central figure (as at Little Horwood nearby) emerge scrollwork dragons in whose mouths the various sins are represented between the spokes of the wheel. Only three can now be identified with certainty—Ira (anger), a soldier or two men fighting; Avaritia (Covetousness), a man with a bag or sack of money over his shoulder; and Luxuria (Lust or Lechery), a man and woman embracing.

"3. Below this is the sole remaining painted consecration cross out of a set of twelve. All these paintings appear to be of about 1330.

"4. The central section of wall between the more easterly window and the north door, measuring approximately 9 ft. by 7 ft., has continuous evidence of painting of several dates, only partly exposed. There is evidence of a staff, a scroll with a black-letter inscription, a brocade pattern of red fleurs-de-lis, and some architecture with a head looking out from an arch. The whole suggests a St. Christopher opposite the main (south) doorway with the hermit and his lantern in his cell.

"5. The section of wall (about 7 ft. long) west of the north door has had a section of the plaster stripped: but elsewhere the same extensive evidence of painting is found, with one or two fragments of good detail exposed. This painting has a later appearance than that at the east end, and it and the St. Christopher [?] may well be fifteenth century.

"6. The western section of wall, again about 7 ft. in length, yielded little evidence of painting, except the remains of a post-Reformation text frame. But time did not permit a very thorough exploration of this area.

"The spandrels on the north side of the wall bore no evidence of having been painted.

"The window splays were not examined, but are heavily lime-washed and are likely to have been painted.

"In the nave much valuable and exciting new evidence of painting was revealed.

"All the spandrels above the south arcade apparently have paintings of at least two dates, though the earlier series will have been cut into by the later clerestory windows and the later set by the still later roof brackets.

"7. (a) Westernmost spandrel, against west wall. Painting of two periods, the later being in red, yellow and black and forming part of an oval frame to a subject.

"(b) Second spandrel from west. This is very thickly coated with lime-wash and was not explored in detail, though painting undoubtedly exists.

"(c) Third spandrel from west. Painting of two periods. The earlier consists of finely drawn drapery in red outline to two or more figures, probably of early fourteenth-century date. The later is in black and yellow and seems to be an armed figure above and part of a curved frame below, as in 7 (a). These may well have been a series of the Patriarchs or the Twelve Tribes of Israel in this position, of seventeenth-century date.

"(d) Fourth spandrel from west. Here was uncovered part of an important early subject beneath the same black and grey seventeenth-century work on superimposed

lime-wash. The scene shows a crowned and bearded king being devoured by a yellow dragon-like monster, while a figure on the right presses down his crown with a staff, another figure being visible behind him. The detail is extremely good; though the precise significance or identity of the scene is not at the moment clear. It suggests part of the Doom or Last Judgment which would have occupied the east wall above the chancel arch.

"(e) Easternmost spandrel above pulpit—not examined, but heavily covered with lime-wash like the rest and probably painted.

"As a general observation, I would venture to point out the vital necessity of keeping the walls as dry as possible; and to this end careful watch should be kept on the gutters and down-pipes, especially on the north side. I observed that these are of the unsatisfactory angular section.

"I also noticed the perished condition of the external rendering on the east wall of the south aisle and elsewhere, which is liable to trap damp and do damage by frost penetration.

"The remains of painting in the church are important: and the possibilities of adding to the series by new discoveries and of increasing our knowledge of medieval art and morality teaching are great, and should be pursued."

PRINCES RISBOROUGH: *Excavation on site of Black Prince's Palace*. The Ministry of Works conducted an excavation on the reputed site of the Black Prince's Palace adjacent to the church, which was due to be developed. The work was in charge of Group Captain Guy Knocker, who has promised his account of the excavation for the next issue of the *Records*.

SOULBURY: *Chelmscott Manor*. Extensive alterations at this most interesting house have revealed further details of the fourteenth-century chapel out of which it is constructed (*R.C.H.M. Bucks.*, Vol. 2, 269). There is evidence of elaborate squints with some original colour, and probably a priest's house or chamber. Much of the detail is of very good and elaborate quality. Mr. H. A. Rolls, the architect in charge, again promised a full account with detail drawings, but it has never materialised.

LANGLEY MARISH, *Kedderminster Almshouses*. It is hoped to prevent a further piece of vandalism by the Slough Council, who have made a closure order on the Kedderminster (or Old) Almshouses at Langley, and blocked an application to the Minister. This charming block of buildings, dated 1617, form with the Church, the Old Clergy House and the Seymour Almshouses (later seventeenth century) a group unique in Buckinghamshire, and hard to equal elsewhere.

STOKE POGES, *Baylis House*. The mortality among the great houses continues at an alarming rate. But it is pleasant to be able to record that a threat to demolish this fine late seventeenth and early eighteenth-century house after the nineteenth-century top storey had been seriously damaged by fire has been averted after strong representations had been made. The building will be restored and used or let off by the Slough Council for various purposes.

AMERSHAM: *Domestic Pottery*. In the course of alterations in the garden at the back of The Gables, 27 High Street, Amersham, the property of Miss Joan Wadge, a quantity of domestic pottery, oyster shells and building debris came to light at a shallow depth, water level being reached at about 3 ft. Most of the pottery fell within the date bracket 1500-1650, and contained remains of Tyggs, cream pans, a large pot, and shallow pans or dishes, mostly with brown glaze. A list of the fragments has been deposited at the Aylesbury Museum.



PLATE 9a. WING. Doorway high at the west end of the nave, north side.



PLATE 9b. WING. Blocked doorway at the east end of the north aisle.





PLATE 10a.



PLATE 10b.

*E. F. Instone*

STANTONBURY. Two views of St. Peter's church taken in 1951 and 1956 respectively.

**HISTORIC CHURCHES PRESERVATION TRUST.** At a meeting called by the Lord Lieutenant, and held in the Judges' Lodgings, Aylesbury, on Saturday, 27th October, 1956, it was decided to form a Buckinghamshire branch of the Historic Churches Preservation Trust. The Lord Lieutenant outlined the need for such a body, and spoke briefly on various approaches which might be made. The Lord Bishop of Buckingham went into further detail of the sums required for dealing with the large number of ancient churches in the county, and there were various other speeches concerned with the project. Some officials and members of this Society are taking an active part in promoting this most necessary object. The Secretary is Mr. W. A. Davenport and the Treasurer is Mr. W. F. Serby.

It is hoped to form local committees to cover the whole topography of our awkwardly long and scattered county. (See also Plate 10.)

**BEACONSFIELD:** *A gold ring from Knotty Green.* An interesting example of an English gold posy ring has been dug up in a garden at Knotty Green, near Beaconsfield. The exact find-spot and date of discovery are uncertain, but have no bearing on the subject.

The ring is of 18-carat gold, and the diameter of the plain hoop is 1.9 centimetres. It is somewhat wider than usual, measuring 0.5 of a centimetre. On the inner surface of the hoop is the inscription, in good Roman lettering, but with T's, H's and E's run together:

✠ RATER·DETH·FEN·DENIALE

Inscribed rings are known from very early times. Dr. Joan Evans, in her comprehensive book *English Posies and Posy Rings* (O.U.P., 1931), lists, among over 2,000 examples of all dates and types, an early specimen in our own collections at Aylesbury. This is a ring brooch inscribed in Lombardic lettering BENEET SEIT QUI ME PORTE (Blessed be he who wears me), and is presumably of thirteenth- or fourteenth-century date. An iconographic ring found at Chalfont St. Peter, with black-letter inscription GOD BE YOUR SPEDE, presumably of late fifteenth-century date, is recorded in *Records of Bucks.*, Vol. XII, 86 and plate.

The term "posy" is a corruption of the word "poesie" and refers to the short verse, sentiment or epigram inscribed on the ring. By far the greatest number have a love, betrothal, marriage or friendship connotation. And, when inscribed in Roman or italic script, date from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. But there are other cases where a religious or even a political meaning can be inferred. In Dr. Evans's book there are nine rings listed which have inscriptions similar to that on the Knotty Green ring, but the exact wording is not paralleled: DENYAIL IS DEATH (Roman caps): *Rather death, than false of faith: Rather die than faith denie* (seven examples with varied spelling, all in italic script). The dates of these examples, where known, range from 1596 to 1624. The lettering of the present ring, and the habit of running T's, H's and E's together, is characteristic of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, and can be seen on many leger stones in churches.

It is probable, then, that our specimen dates from the last years of Queen Elizabeth I's reign or in the early years of James I. And it is tempting to see in the inscribed "posy" the pious thought of some popish recusant, who would have needed all his resolution in this ultra-Protestant area, rather than a lover's sentiment. The fact that a cross precedes the inscription, though not conclusive, is at least suggestive of a religious interpretation.

I am greatly indebted to Mr. R. L. S. Bruce-Mitford for his help in preparing

this note. He kindly examined the ring and discussed it with me, and allowed me to inspect many dozen examples in the British Museum collection. The ring is now in the writer's possession.

E. C. R.

WING: *The Church*. Little can be added to the account of the discoveries reported in the *Records* for 1953-4. The head of the doorway at the western end of the north wall of the nave was found to be slightly damaged and a few missing voussoirs have been restored with stone selected from its filling. A little early plaster still remains in this doorway and has been left visible. (Plate 9).

An examination of the chancel walls has shown that no traces of the original windows exist within the church. They seem to have been deeply splayed, and it is clear that their internal features were destroyed when they were blocked.

Wing has always been a notable Saxon church; the recent discoveries greatly enhance its interest to students of early ecclesiastical architecture. A. V. W.

STANTON LOW. A Roman building has been bitten into by gravel extractions half a mile east of St. Peter's Church. Destruction was well advanced before detection of Roman debris on the silt heaps by a junior member of the Wolverton Archaeological Society.

The site has been examined by Miss Butcher, of the Ministry of Works, Mr. T. Hume and Mr. Alan Warhurst, of Northampton, and the local Society hopes to open the remaining portion in early spring, under Ministry supervision.

The building is of stone with tiled roof and hypocaust floor heating, but the precise nature or even the exact size of it cannot yet be ascertained. The site, along the river bank, is low and at present mostly under water.

C. W. G.

MARLOW. *Harleyford House*. Since our last issue, this riverside house, long the seat of the Clayton family for whom it was built by Robert Taylor in 1755 (*Records*, Vol. XV, p. 9), has been demolished.

AYLESBURY. *Wotton House*. A similar fate to Harleyford appears to await Wotton. No tenant has been forthcoming and the County Council is not prepared to maintain their Preservation Order indefinitely; only the Minister's decision (which is now awaited) can save the main house, but there is a possibility that the twin stable buildings and gates may yet be preserved.

AMERSHAM. *Shardeloes*. A third house, better known than either Harleyford or Wotton, is Shardeloes. An early work (1759-61) of Robert Adam and owned by the Tyrwhitt-Drake family from 1603 until this year, its fate has been uncertain for some time. Strong local pressure has been brought to bear against the threat of demolition. Just as we go to press, it has been announced that the house has been bought by Mr. Ian MacTaggart, who hopes to preserve it.

CLAYDON HOUSE. To counter-balance the depressing tale of destruction, it is gratifying to record that in 1956 the National Trust accepted the gift of Claydon House with an endowment from Mr. Ralph Verney, who will continue to live there. It will be regularly open to the public this summer.

Claydon is fully described and illustrated by Mr. Christopher Hussey in the first volume of his *English Country Houses—Early Georgian, 1715-1760* (Country Life, 1955), together with two other examples of Rococo work in Bucks., Hartwell House and West Wycombe Park.

E.V.