

Proceedings of the Society, 1879.

THE ANNUAL MEETING was held at St. Albans on Thursday, July 24th. some of the Members having expressed a desire to inspect the Abbey Church of St. Alban—Britain's proto-martyr—the Committee decided on making an excursion there.

The members and their friends left the Aylesbury station of the London and North Western Railway at 10.5 a.m., and on arriving at St. Albans made their way to the grand old Abbey Church. Here they were met by some members of the kindred Society of St. Albans, and Mr. Chapple, surveyor of the diocese of Rochester and clerk of the restoration works.

Mr. CHAPPLE, having assembled the party under the tower, gave a most lucid and exhaustive account, chronologically, of the past history of the edifice, and of the steps which have been taken to restore it to its former beauty. He commenced his observations by expressing the pleasure he experienced at being enabled to oblige his friend Mr. Lowndes, whom he had known at Chesham many years ago, when the church of that place underwent restoration under the direction of the late Sir Gilbert Scott, who, as they knew, had also been the architect for the restoration of St. Alban's, and whose rule had always been to carry out such works as nearly as possible without deviating from the lines of the original builders. He then alluded to the martyrdom of St. Alban, to whom the church was dedicated, which took place in the persecution of Diocletian, A.D. 303. The saint, according to tradition, was buried under the site now occupied by his shrine, or, as some have supposed, under the north transept. A little memorial church was erected soon after his death on the site of the martyrdom. This church is mentioned by the venerable Bede, and remained until Offa II., King of the Mercians, in 795, founded the present abbey and a monastery of the Benedictine Order of Monks. Materials were afterwards collected by Ealdred, the eighth abbot, from the ancient city of Verulam, for the purpose of rebuilding the abbey, but it was delayed until William the Conqueror, in 1077, appointed Paul de Caen to the abbey. The work of building a larger and more magnificent structure was inaugurated by Paul of Caen, and carried out in the course of the next three centuries by Abbots De Cella, Trumpington, Eversden, Wheathampstead, and Wallingford. The abbey church in its present state remains unaltered in the main from its state in the sixteenth century. In 1870 the central tower, which is unique and beyond comparison with that of any tower of its date remaining in England, was found to be in a very dangerous condition; prompt measures were at once taken to avert its threatened fall, and the consequent destruction of the whole building. The difficult work of shoring it up was fully explained by Mr. Chapple, and it was successfully accomplished. From the floor line the height of the tower, which with the transepts, the choir, and a part of the nave, was the work of Paul de Caen, the first Norman abbot, was 144 feet. Paul pulled down the Saxon Church and built the Norman one, partly with the materials of its

predecessor, and partly with others taken from Verulam. The only Saxon portions now remaining are some columns in the triforia on the east side of the transepts. Mr. Chapple called attention to a cap of one of the Saxon columns of Purbeck marble, which was interesting as showing that the Purbeck quarries were in use before the time of the Conquest. Referring to the colour of the walls, he said Sir G. Scott had an idea that the interior walls had been originally white, but had been coloured in the thirteenth century. After remarking that the abbey gave examples of the several leading periods of church architecture—the Norman of the twelfth century, the Early English of the thirteenth century, the Decorative of the fourteenth century, and the Perpendicular of the fifteenth century—he pointed out that the great structural alteration in the Norman abbey of Paul de Caen, was made by John de Cella, who was abbot from 1195 to 1214, and who designed and began to rebuild the western part of the nave in the Early English style of his own period, but was obliged, by want of funds to carry out his designs, to limit himself to the commencement of the erection of the west towers, respecting which Sir G. Scott said there did not exist in England a work so perfect in art. John de Cella's design was to lower the floor line of the porches, and intended that the high altar should be reached by a succession of steps from the west. (The original floor line is now exposed in the north and south porches.) The nave is the longest in the world, and the extreme total length of the building is 550 feet. The view therefore, when the restorations are completed, from west to east, will be especially interesting. John de Cella's successor, William de Trumpington, continued the building, but sacrificed from economical motives de Cella's designs, and thus was enabled to complete them, though in an inferior manner. Mr. Chapple explained the manner in which the south aisle of the western part of the nave, which was very much out of the perpendicular, had been shored up and pushed into its original perpendicular position. During the abbacy of Hugh de Eversden, between 1308 and 1326, the Norman piers on the south side of the nave gave way on the day of St. Paulinus in 1325, and two large columns with the roof fell down while a large congregation were hearing mass. The rebuilding of the ruined portion was commenced by Eversden's successor, Abbot Wallingford, who diverted the funds intended for the repairs to the erection of an astronomical clock. For this a complaint against him was made to the king, who, in reply, said there was only one man who could make an astronomical clock, whilst any one could construct an abbey. After noticing other architectural details, as the chapel of St. Stephen, and two apsidal chapels, particularly commending a doorway of Norman architecture, of the period of Henry II., as almost unique, the only other instance within his knowledge being in Dunstable Church, Mr. Chapple led his audience into the choir. Here he showed that the work of restoration had been virtually completed. One of the principal points to which he directed attention in the choir was the painted roofs. During the repair of those roofs it was discovered that beneath a painted ceiling of the seventeenth century, were older paintings of greatly superior character. The comparatively modern paint was skilfully removed, and some grand specimens of mediæval work were thus brought to light. There were in all sixty-six panels in eleven rows of six panels each, all with different designs. One of the most spirited of these designs represented the martyrdom of St. Alban. After passing through the south aisle of the choir, and remarking upon several objects of interest there, the altar or Wallingford screen was inspected. It was erected by Abbot Wallingford, and Mr. Chapple enlarged upon the beauty of the workmanship, and the architectural skill displayed. Various restorations were noticed in this part, as the polished

Purbeck marble steps, which had been substituted for the previous stone steps; the pavement in imitation of the old one, and some beautiful tabernacle work. The saints' chapel and shrine were subjects of much interesting description. In February, 1872, the workmen, in opening out the eastern arches of the sanctuary, discovered about two thousand fragments of Purbeck marble built into the walls as common rubble masonry. These fragments have been put together, and form a large portion of the once gorgeous shrine of St. Alban. Some portions of another shrine, dedicated to St. Amphibalus, were also discovered. These fragments have been put together, and though there are many deficiencies in the original designs, yet there is no question about the marvellous skill and artistic taste of those who erected them in the first instance. The watching chamber in St. Alban's Chapel was erected by Wheathampstead about 1430. The monks, from this chamber, continually watched the shrine, both by night and by day. The beautiful Lady Chapel was next visited, and its characteristic architectural features detailed. There was a public footpath through it, which has been lately stopped up, and the east end had been used as a school for more than a century, but it is now under the course of restoration. According to the annals of the monastery, the heart of one of the abbots, Abbot Norton, was buried before the altar in the south aisle. Its receptacle had been discovered, being a cylindrical hole sunk in a block of stone, in which was found a small box of oriental design, and bearing upon it characters which were pronounced to be Arabic. This box was supposed to have contained the heart of the abbot. Mr. Chapple went over the portions of the Abbey still under restoration, commenting as he did so upon various points, and again expressed the pleasure it had given him to have been of any service.

At the close of his description, the Ven. Archdeacon CUST returned the thanks of the Society and all present to Mr. Chapple, for the kindness he had shown them, and the valuable and interesting information he had given. Mr. CHAPPLE, in response, again alluded to his old acquaintance with Mr. Lowndes as supplying abundant motive for his doing anything in his power to serve a Society with which that gentleman was connected.

The party adjourned to the Peahen Inn for refreshment, after which the Annual Meeting was held. The Ven. Archdeacon PUREY CUST, who presided, proposed Mr. Du Pré as chairman, which having been agreed to, the Vice-Presidents were re-elected, as were also the Honorary Secretaries, the Treasurer, and the Auditors. Mr. LOWNDES then read the balance-sheet, by which it appeared that there was a balance due to the Treasurer of £12 0s. 9d. in December, 1878. He observed that the balance in question had been reduced by a donation of £5 from Mr. Du Pré, which he felt bound to mention as a mark of personal kindness to himself and of the interest he took in the well-being of the Society. Twelve new members were elected. The meeting then rose, after examining some interesting deeds regarding land in the parish of Ellesborough, which were submitted to it by the Rev. W. T. Drake, of Gaddesden, and one of which seemed to have been executed by Richard de Molines, Prior of Dunstable, in the early part of the thirteenth century. One or two other archaeological curiosities were shown by another gentleman.

On leaving the Peahen Inn, the members were conducted by the Rev. H. FOWLER to the site of the Roman city of Verulam. On the way, he pointed out the clock tower, and also a drinking fountain which now occupies the site of a commemorative cross to Eleanor, Queen of Edward I., erected where her body rested on its way to Westminster. The cross was destroyed in 1702. He then led them down the British trackway across the little river Ver, where a dam had doubtless been

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Page 103, line 24, *for* "his chair and attired in his Chancellor's robes,"
read "a doublet and hose."

raised in order to make the river a boundary and protection to the city. Mr. Fowler pointed out the entrances to the city, the remains of the walls and a fosse, and also mentioned the direction of the old Roman roads. The walls, according to Camden, were twelve feet in thickness; they were composed of layers of flints, embedded in a strong cement of lime, small gravel, and coarse sand, and interspersed with layers of large Roman tiles, and formed a most massive and durable piece of masonry. Extensive discoveries of Roman remains have been made, and amongst them, the foundations of several ancient villas, a theatre, and a temple near St. Michael's Church. Camden says, "Were I to relate what common report affirms, of the many Roman coins, statues of gold and silver, vessels, marble pillars, cornices, and wonderful monuments of ancient art dug up here, I should scarcely be believed."

The last object of interest in the day's excursion was the Church of St. Michael, founded by Ulsinus, the sixth abbot, in 948. It was built within the boundaries of the city of Verulam, and its walls are composed chiefly of flints and Roman tiles. Sir G. Scott made a careful survey of the church, and reported that the piers and arches of the nave, which were formerly supposed to be Saxon, are of the twelfth century, the clere-story and south aisle of the thirteenth century, the windows and roof of the nave of the fifteenth century, and the tower of the sixteenth century. It was restored in 1866. One of the chief objects of interest in the church is the monument of Lord Bacon on the north side of the chancel, where the great statesman is represented as seated in his arm-chair and attired in his Chancellor's robes.

The party then returned by the side of the "fish-ponds" and the river Ver to the station, and thence to Aylesbury, where they arrived at 7.12 p.m., after a most pleasant and instructive excursion.