

WYCOMBE AND ITS ANTIQUITIES.*

BY JOHN PARKER, F.S.A.

THE old town of Wycombe lies in narrow valleys in the midst of the Chiltern Hills ; it was almost surrounded in ancient times by beech forests. Through the main valley was a road from Oxford to London, and to the royal borough of Windsor; the poor scholar must often have tramped this road from the metropolis to the university town in mediæval times. Through the hills at the north and the south of Wycombe may be seen, by deep indentations, the ancient British roads ; the one on the northern hill leading to the old town of Amersham, or Agmondesham, and the other on the southern hill leading to Great Marlow and the Thames valley. On the northern hill, on a fine position, and commanding the valley, stood the Castle, just above the town.

A very carefully-prepared plan of the ancient town of Wycombe and its precincts accompanies the "Early History of Wycombe," and discloses to the reader the great antiquity of the place. The Romans are the first who have left their mark on the locality, and, without particularizing at present, on the picturesque hill at the south, known by the significant name of Keep Hill, a Roman camp is distinctly visible, and in the valley just below is the site of a Roman villa, of which I shall have more to say hereafter. In the town itself the chief objects of interest are the remains of the Norman hall of the Hospital of St. John the Baptist, and the church of All Saints, an Early English building, and one among the very finest parish churches in the kingdom. But a town, that is believed to have been made a free burgh by Henry I., whose long list of representatives can be traced to Stephen Ayott and Thomas Taylur, who were elected

* "The Early History and Antiquities of Wycombe in Buckinghamshire," by the late John Parker. Butler and Son, Wycombe, 1878.



The Arms of the Corporation of Wycombe are thus depicted in the Herald's Visitation of the County of Bucks. in the year 1575, and again in the Visitation of the County in 1634 in which last named year Mathew Petiffer is stated to have been Mayor.

An ancient Sculpture in the possession of the Writer similarly displays the Arms.

The modern Arms of the Corporation appear therefore to be incorrect, in as much as the wings of the Swan are spread, see a very interesting paper on "The Swan of Buckingham" by Henry Gough, Esquire, in the Records of Buckinghamshire for 1870.

to serve in the Parliament at Westminster in the twenty-eighth year of the reign of Edward I., and the names of whose mayors are handed down to us from the fourteenth year of the reign of Edward IV., has no mean claim to the attention of the antiquary and the student of history. To Buckinghamshire men Wycombe has a peculiar interest, as being not only an ancient town, but as having a future history before it, evidenced by its gradual increase in size and importance.

No great British trackway passed through Wycombe. The Ikenield Street, stretching from the coast of Norfolk to Cenia, a British town on the coast of Cornwall, passed along the Chiltern Hills to the north-west of the Wycombe valleys. Nor was Wycombe more favoured at the time of the Roman occupation, it lay between the two great military roads, at about equal distances from each, the one leading from Londinium (London) to Deva (Chester), and the other leading from Londinium to Aquæ Solis (Bath). It is true that there is some impression that a Roman road passed through the town, but it is not mentioned either in the Itinerary of Antoninus or of Richard of Cirencester. Let us dwell for a few moments on the two important roads, to which reference has just been made. The northern, or rather north-western road, was no doubt much frequented, as it led to the great City of Deva, the station of the twentieth legion; this is the only main road that crossed the county of Buckingham, it passed along the north-east corner of the county, having a station at a town called Magiovinum, in the vicinity of Fenny Stratford. But doubtless the road to Aquæ Solis (the waters of the sun) had many attractions, and was a road that might naturally be taken by those living in the neighbourhood of Wycombe. A learned writer,* speaking of the rich district between Sorbiodunm (Old Sarum) and Glevum (Gloucester), says: "In its centre stood a city remarkable for its splendid edifices, its temples, its buildings for public amusements, and still more for its medicinal baths. For this latter reason it was called Aquæ Solis, and for the same cause its representative in modern times has received the name of Bath. Remains of the Roman bathing-houses have

* "The Celt, the Roman, and the Saxon," by Thomas Wright. P. 142.

been discovered in the course of modern excavations. Among its temples was a magnificent one dedicated to Minerva, who is supposed to have been the patron goddess of the place. From inscriptions found at different periods it appears that military commanders, high municipal officers, and other persons of rank, frequented this city for the benefit of its waters."

It was the centre from which many roads communicated to every part of the island. We naturally are interested in tracing the road, which led from Londinium to this famed city in connection with the subject before us. The road took the direction from Londinium through the present towns of Brentford and Hounslow to Staines, where it crossed the Thames over a bridge, from which the Roman town at this place took the name of Pontes.* It then continued in a south-westerly direction, till it reached the celebrated town of Calleva (Silchester). The site of this town is between Reading and Basingstoke, and the nearest point to reach it is from the Mortimer Station of the Great Western Railway. The walls of the town enclosed an area three miles in circuit. The excavations on the spot are well worth a journey of inspection. Burton, in his *Commentary on the Itinerary of Antoninus*, calls this town Vindonum, and gives an authority, Ninnius, for asserting that this city was built by Constantius, the father of Constantine the Great.† Leaving Calleva the road passed through Spinæ, the modern name of which is believed to be Speen, a village in Berkshire, thence to Cunetio, the site now called Folly Farm, near Marlborough; the next station would be Verlucio, not far from the town of Chippenham, and thence to Aquæ Solis.‡

Now, though Wycombe was at some distance from any great military road, yet the fact of a Roman villa of some importance having been discovered in its neighbourhood, gives us some evidence of the very general occupation of our island by the Romans. When every vestige of beauty was demolished, and when to Saxon eyes a statue or bust

* Wright's "Celt, Roman, and Saxon," p. 135.

† Burton's "Commentary on Antoninus's Itinerary," p. 265.

‡ See Brewer's "Introduction to the Beauties of England." Map of the Roman roads.

was an implement of magic to be broken to pieces, the occurrence of this subsequent barbaric invasion of England makes it necessary to be reminded that the Roman occupation lasted nearly four hundred years.

Frequent discoveries reveal to us the fact that England was covered, particularly in the midland southern counties, with large and elegant rural mansions of Roman nobles. In the larger villas we trace the different courts and compartments, from the halls, with their cunningly-worked tessellated pavements, to the quarters of the slaves. We discover all the appliances of comfort and luxury, which the baths and the perfect system of heating disclose to us. To compare for a moment the comforts of a Roman villa with the grim interior of a mediæval castle, centuries after, will lead us to reflect on the strange and lengthened decline which had taken place in European civilization, socially considered.

The records of the Wycombe Municipal Charity Trustees for the year 1724 disclosed the finding of Roman tessellated pavements in a mead called Great Penns Mead, about a quarter of a mile from the borough; the pavement is described as "set in curious figures, as circles, squares, hearts, and many other curious figures, with a beast in the centre, in a circle, like a dog standing sideways by a tree, all set with stones about a quarter of an inch square." By means of the descriptions of property in a lease granted in the reign of Henry VIII., Great Penns Mead was identified in the year 1862, and the following was the result of the exploration of the meadow in that year.

"The remains of a Roman villa were uncovered, consisting of the foundations of a portico, the floors of several apartments, and an atrium or hall, consisting of a square flanked by two oblongs, the whole being enclosed by bands of double and single guilloche. The oblong compartments contain a series of sea monsters with twisted tails. The square is again resolved into a smaller central square (the design of which is lost), with four still smaller squares at the angles, which are occupied by female busts, representing the Horæ or goddesses of the seasons. The one that remains perfect appears to represent the spring. All the mosaics are executed with very fine tesserae of black, blue, red, yellow, and white, on a

solid basis of flints and rubble. Another compartment also contained mosaic pavement, with a margin of common red tesserae * * * * The site of the pavement discovered in 1724 was at the entrance to the villa, and no doubt was the well-known Cave Canem recorded as having been found. * * * The entire central building lay only from twelve to eighteen inches below the surface. Leaving the central building, we proceed through the court of the villa to the eastern fortification wall. At the north end, near the brook which runs close by, are the foundations of inner and outer walls; in the latter are the remains of two turrets, eighteen feet apart; between these was an entrance to the villa, traces of which still remain in the wall. The turrets project five feet from the wall, and are paved with common red tesserae, each having a seat of the same pavement. Southward from these turrets are the most remarkable remains brought to light, composing a distinct set of compartments of much larger dimensions than those in the central building. The largest apartment had a hypocaust, and the ruins of the pilae were found mixed with pieces of guilloche pavement of superior workmanship, and rubbed to a fine surface. Nearly adjoining the larger apartment, at a depth of about four feet, was found, what, without doubt, was the bath, having pavement composed of white tesserae, each about half-an-inch square, the margin and other parts being laid in red. The sides were plastered and decorated in fresco; a part of a fish resembling a roach was painted on one of them, with the colours in a good state of preservation. The following relics were found, *i.e.*, an arrow head, two bone hair-pins, and a statera, or miniature steelyard, in bronze, similarly engraved to one found at Cirencester. * * * * It is remarkable that none of the remains lately discovered appear to have been known to the antiquarians of 1724." *

Accompanying this description is a ground plan of the villa, which completes the information on this interesting discovery.

The history of our towns, of their institutions, their liberties, and privileges, is well worthy of our considera-

* "Early History of Wycombe," pp. 2 and 3.

tion. It appears almost certain that the Roman civilization in this country is the foundation upon which municipal rights were originally based; rude as the Saxon was, he had the great notion of the family tie, he abhorred centralization; the tything, the hundred, each was connected of itself with a government. Can we not then imagine that, though the luxury and refinements of the Roman might have been despised, yet the privileges and independence of citizenship commended themselves to the rude invader? To make, therefore, the charter of a Plantagenet king the starting-point of our municipal privileges is wholly a mistake. The Norman conquest did not efface the independent spirit of the burgher; he might have to submit for a time to the tyranny of William of Normandy and his descendants, but he preserved the spirit which he had received from his Saxon parentage, and he waited his opportunity to claim his ancient rights. The king, perhaps, needed the support of the burgher against the baron; then his time was come, he told the monarch the rights his town had long enjoyed, and he asked that those rights should be secured. The charter embodied the cherished privileges, which hitherto had been handed down traditionally, but which now were solemnly confirmed.

These remarks occur to me in tracing the history of an ancient town, such as Wycombe. Although Wycombe was recognized in the charters of successive sovereigns as a prescriptive borough, yet it is not so described in the Domesday Book, nor do the municipal muniments give the date of its incorporation, which, however, is ascribed to Henry I. None of his charters are extant, but it is probable that the charter relating to Wycombe was only confirmatory of liberties and privileges long previously enjoyed by the burgesses.

In perusing the several charters, which are printed in an appendix to the "Early History of Wycombe," we find that the majority of them, till we come to the charter of 5th and 6th Philip and Mary, are simple confirmations of the charter of the 21st Henry III.; in this charter we discover that contentions had existed between the burgesses of Wycombe and Alan Basset, to whom, by an earlier charter, 5th of John, the crown had granted the Manor of Wycombe. This Alan was a powerful baron, and appears in history as one of the barons present at the

signing of Magna Charta. The charter of the 21st Henry III. recites an agreement between Alan and the burgesses, who complain of "wrongs and injuries which the said Alan did to them." By this agreement Alan granted to the burgesses all the borough with the rents, markets, and fairs, and the buildings of *Enaventhorn*,* except his demesnes, outlying lands, and mills for £30 and one mark a-year; there are also stipulations in this agreement, amongst others, that "the said Alan shall have the dung found in the streets of Wycombe"—this singular privilege is still held by the occupier of the Bassetsbury Mill, the mill attached to Alan's manor house, who to this day still continues the weekly scavenger of the Wycombe streets. The king by this charter confirms the agreement between Alan and the burgesses.

But when we come to the charter of Philip and Mary, we arrive at one of the governing charters of this ancient borough. It appears that this charter was granted to the burgesses as a reward for their fidelity to Mary during her short, but chequered and unhappy reign; the queen had, as we know, twice undergone considerable anxiety. At the commencement of her reign, John, Duke of Northumberland, had disputed her claim to the throne, and had, in fact, proclaimed the Lady Jane Grey Queen of England; another occasion of disquietude had been the opposition to her marriage with Philip of Spain, whose bigotry and intolerance had reached the ears of the people of this island; this dissatisfaction culminated in the feeble rebellion of Sir Thomas Wyatt; now during both these rebellions, the charter says, the burgesses "have most faithfully adhered to us, and have manfully resisted the same rebellions." By this charter Wycombe was constituted a free borough, it was ordained that there should be twelve principal burgesses, a steward, and two bailiffs, power was given to the mayor, bailiffs, and burgesses to hold a court for recovery of debts not exceeding £20; amongst other privileges the mayor, bailiffs, and burgesses might hold a market every Friday, and two yearly fairs, one on the Feast of the Translation of St. Thomas the Martyr, and the other on the Feast of the "Exaltation of the Holy Cross," "together with a Court

* Court of Burgesses.

of Piepouder there to be holden during the time of the same marts or fairs." The boundaries of the borough, as they existed up to last year, are clearly defined in this charter; these boundaries are now extended by the Wycombe Extension Act, 1880, to meet the requirements of united government for the town, which has within the last few years far outstretched the limits known in Mary's reign. Power is also given to the mayor, bailiffs, and burgesses to elect "two discreet and honest men to be burgesses of the Parliament," and these are to be sent to Parliament at the "charge of the said borough and the commonality thereof," as was indeed the custom in those times, the ambition for a seat in Parliament being then not so keenly felt as at the present day; rather, it may be said, that we have evidence of a reluctance on the part of knights of shires and members of boroughs, in finding their way to their seats at Westminster. The charter is an exhaustive document, as to the regulation for the good order and governance of the town, and the worthy burgesses, doubtless, on acquiring the privileges which it conferred, regarded with complacency the acknowledgments of their loyalty to the queen.

The "Early History of Wycombe" informs us that "the borough was governed by a court of burgesses up to the middle or latter part of the fourteenth century, when we find the first mention of mayors *officially appointed* as such; about that period the municipal body seems to have been composed of the mayor, two bailiffs, two gildans,* and the burgesses called the commonality. Aldermen do not appear till the fifteenth century. They were, as we have seen by the charter of Philip and Mary, called principal burgesses, and were twelve in number, including the Mayor. The corporation then consisted of a mayor, twelve aldermen, a high steward, and two bailiffs.

"The first mention of a mayor, occurs in the reign of Edward the I., when Roger Outred, Oughtred, or Hutred, is described as Mayor in each year up to 1302.

* Part of the duties of the gildan was to see to the proper observance of the privileges of the burgesses, as to the depasturing cattle in the Rye Mead, an extensive piece of pasture land attached to the town.

He was succeeded by Gervase le Baker, who continued in office until 1320.*

There is a charter of the 40th Queen Elizabeth, and also one of 6th James I. These are, for the most part, confirmations of Philip and Mary's charter; but by the charter of James a first Recorder was appointed, and the office of steward was abolished. The last charter of importance to the borough is that of the 15th Charles II., which is esteemed the governing charter; it is, however, a recapitulation of the charters which have been previously mentioned. The only other charters granted in connection with this borough which need be mentioned, are one of the 13th Henry III., by which Henry granted a fair on the eve of Saint Margaret to the Hospital of Lepers "of Saint Margaret of Wycombe," the site of which was in the grounds of Wycombe Abbey; the other charter is the 4th Elizabeth, by which the queen grants the corporation licence to found a grammar school of "one master or pedagogue," and also to support four poor persons of the town. To enable the corporation to carry out this scheme, the queen grants to the mayor, bailiffs, and burgesses the Hospital of "Saint John the Baptist in Wycombe," and the lands of the hospital in Buckinghamshire, and also certain other property known as "our lady rents." On this charter we shall have more to say hereafter.

We have seen that the boundaries of the borough were defined by the charter of Philip and Mary, but the following quotations from the "Early History of Wycombe," (pp. 34, 35), as to the earlier limits of the town, will interest those who have some knowledge of the locality.

"It is conjectured, and there is every reason to believe it was the fact, that the present boundary of the borough, as described in the charters and more in detail in the copy of its perambulation, is comparatively modern. The names of 'New Land,' 'La Grene' (Frogmore), and Easton Town, indicate that they were outside the ancient terræ dominicales, the 'inland' or demesne, constituting the small burgh and homestead, or dwelling of the Saxon Chief, which, in all probability, extended from the end of White Hart Street to the bottom of Crendon Lane, and from the castle and church on the north, to

* "History of Wycombe," p. 22.

Bridge Mill at the bottom of Paul's Row on the south. Within this limit seem to have dwelt the burgesses who cultivated the common fields on the slopes of the hills and depastured their cattle in the Rye * * * * The plan of the Hospital of St. John, in Easton Street, shows that the site of it extended down to the mill stream, and that the present road was subsequently cut through it. Easton Street was probably at first only a road for the most part leading to the hospital, and to the mill called Pan Mill, around which a few houses gradually sprang up, which were called Easton or Easton Town. The road leading from Great Marlow to the north of the county by Crendon Lane, left Wycombe on the left, just as the road leading to London by the old Windsor way, left it on the right. The town might thus be barred up at nights without interfering with traffic about the country. East of the town you would then have an open space, and when the hospital came to be built in the twelfth century, it is here that the site would naturally be selected. East Town, as appears by the records, had its separate fair, and this fair is confirmatory of its being a distinct district. The old Windsor way near Loakes, and the name of Horsenden, seem to point out the locality of the ancient hamlet of Horseyne, which disappeared, as the borough grew up in a more convenient situation. Any difficulty that may occur to the reader, as to the disappearance of a hamlet in the middle ages will be removed, when it is borne in mind that the homes of the peasants were for the most part mud-walled huts covered with thatch, and easily changed their locality."

The Church Square is indicated as the site of the ancient demesne lands of Wycombe, and "when the burgesses became *sui juris*, it was in the middle of Church Square that they very naturally would erect their 'Geld-Halle,' and the space round this site may account for the curved line taken by Paul's Row, which in the earliest times must have been the lane surrounding the homestead * * * * The position of the [Bridge] Mill and the Church clearly shows that the demesne homestead would be situated between them, and the castle and mound would have been originally erected as a defence to the demesne below."

It is interesting to consider the constitution of an

ordinary borough town in the middle ages. We shall see, in the case of Wycombe, that a town at that period was left very much to its own resources in its internal government and general condition. Thick forests, wide heaths, bad roads, all contributed to disconnect the towns from the country and each other; the annual fair, we may presume, was the single occasion, when an influx from without set in and the year's purchases were made by the townspeople from the travelling hawkers, who brought their wares from London and the great cities. At all other times the privileges of local trades were jealously protected; in fact, the community of the mediæval town may be considered as self-supporting, and living under a distinct and truly inquisitorial government.

The mayor and his brethren, we are told, anciently possessed almost absolute authority within the borough.

An order in 1398 is interesting. "That no man of whatever condition shall be delaying in the town of Wycombe after ten o'clock at night; any wanderer ought to go out of the town, unless he have reasonable cause for wandering therein. And if anyone be so found wandering about after the said hour, he shall be immediately seized and imprisoned by the servants of the town and detained in prison, until he be set at liberty by the mayor (or some one holding his place) and the commonality."

From the ancient records it appears that an extensive cloth manufactory was carried on in Wycombe; there are orders, one in 1316, and another temp. Henry VIII., regulating the working of weavers in the borough, which are worth an inspection. In 1609, we find, the "tailors inhabiting within the borough" complain, "that they were much oppressed with the number of fforeyne Taylors continuallye coming into the libertys * * * Whereupon y^t was ordered by the then maior, aldermen and bailiffs present, and consenting at the requeste and humble suite of the said taylors, that from thenceforthe noe fforreyne Taylor excepte he were eyther borne, or hadd seaven yeares served as an apprentice to a Taylor w^{thin} the boroughe sho^d come to dwell, or to keepe any shoppe w^{thin} this boroughe upon payne to hav his shoppe windowes shutt uppe by the serjeante for tyme beinge," etc.

Space would not permit further quotations from the very interesting records of the corporation; they are un-

fortunately not complete, as the records of the borough courts during the Lancasterian period have perished; still they deserve the attention, and prominent position given to them in the history before us.

In the Harleian MSS. it is recorded that a wealthy Saxon named Snarting built the church at Wycombe, and it is supposed to have been consecrated between the years 1070 and 1092, and was dedicated to All Saints. Scarcely a vestige of this church is preserved. "About the year 1186, St. Hugh, Bishop of Lincoln, confirmed the grant (made by Hen. I.) of the church of Wycombe to the House of St. Mary and St. John the Baptist of Godstown."* The present church was erected partly on the site of Snarting's church in the thirteenth century, it originally consisted of nave, aisles, chancel, and a central tower. Many of the Early English windows are fortunately preserved, but the central tower has disappeared, and the original roof of the nave has made way for a perpendicular roof and clerestory windows supported upon arches of the same style. The fine west end tower, perfecting the present church, was, we are told, erected in the year 1522 under the superintendence of Rowland Messenger, a former vicar of Wycombe, and its completion was celebrated with much rejoicing, "ryngying of bellys and pypying of organs."† The length of this grand old parish church is 180 feet, and the height of the nave is 48 feet; its recent restoration, under the eminent architect Mr. Street, brings out its pristine beauty of proportion, and renders it an object of admiration to all who enter within its walls.

Among the long list of vicars of Wycombe, perhaps Rowland Messenger was the one who would claim more especial attention. He appears to have been a man of considerable architectural skill, and was appointed by Cardinal Wolsey "a clerk or controller of the works on the erection of the tower of Christ Church, Oxford, in 1525,"‡ but he also gained unenviable notoriety in his zeal against heretics; he was appointed by Longland, Bishop of Lincoln, to take the oversight of the burning of Thomas Harding of

* "History of Wycombe," p. 92. † Ibid. p. 102. ‡ Ibid. p. 102.

Chesham, for denying the real presence in the sacrament. Foxe the martyrologist mentions Rowland Messenger on the occasion of Thomas Rowe of Great Marlow coming to Wycombe to do penance on abjuring his heresy, and of Messenger "binding his fagot with a silken lace."

One of the most interesting inquiries for the antiquarian in his researches into the archives of Wycombe will be with reference to the *Chapel of St. Mary*. We know not its site, but we have just enough information relating to it to establish the fact, that it was a favourite sanctuary with the burgesses. The chapel to which we refer was not merely the usual chapel dedicated to the Virgin behind the high altar; whether it was situated in the street called Bynethe-brigge [Beneath or Beyond Bridge] * afterwards and now known as St. Mary Street, or whether it was a building attached to the church of All Saints—this much we do know, that it was a chapel of some importance; it had its separate wardens, who were always burgesses of standing,† and were indifferently styled "Wardens," "Churchmen," or Collectors of St. Mary's Chapel, and on the re-building of the chapel in 1338 four wardens came into office called "custodes operis Beatae Mariæ." Foxe the martyrologist assists us in gaining some idea of the chapel itself; we find from him that it had its separate rood loft, an evidence thus afforded, beyond the evidence we possess of the re-building of this chapel between the years 1338 and 1378, of a distinct edifice for pre-reformational worship. Foxe's story is as follows:—"That Henry Phip was accused in the Bishop of Lincoln's Court, for that being chosen roodman or keeper of the rood loft of St. Mary's Chapel, he should say, that he must go and tend a candle before his block Almighty, for which he abjured his error in 1521 before Bishop Longland."

To the chapel of St. Mary the richer burgesses made many bequests and offerings: thus in the reign of Edward I., "Ralph de Croindene of Wycombe grants to God and the chapel of the Blessed Mary of Wycombe for the support of a chaplain there serving God, and the blessed Mary, for the health of the souls of him and his

* "History of Wycombe," p. 130.

† Ibid. p. 131.

ancestor, a piece of ground near the churchyard of the church of All Saints, between the tenement of Thomas le Wander and William le Cotilier."

On the 18th March, 45th Edward III., "William Fere of Wycombe grants to Thomas Reeve, Walter Noble, and Richard Hughete, wardens of the work of the Blessed Mary of Wycombe, a messuage in Newland Street, between the meadow of William atte Dene and that late of John Sandwelle, they paying yearly 6s. 8d. to the grantor and Ceele [*sic*, *qy.* Cecily or Celia] his wife." These are quotations, and others might be added, from deeds in Latin, translated by the late Mr. Riley, and printed in the Fifth Report of the Historical Manuscripts Commission. The deeds themselves are in the possession of the Governors of the Wycombe Grammar School Foundation. Amongst the ledgers in the possession of the governors is an extract from the will of Edward Cary the elder, dated circ. 1475, by which the testator directs that if it happen that Margaret Wykes die without heirs of her body, then the tenement he describes is "to remain to the mayor and burgesses of the said town and their successors for ever, to the sustaining of the chapel of the Blessed Virgin, and for the sustaining of a chaplain to sing mass for the souls of" those named in the will. The quotation from this will is given to show the connection there existed between the chapel and the corporate body.

The inventory taken in 1519 "of the godes jewellys and ornaments belongynge to the chapelle of our Lady," discloses the costly offerings that were then presented; and amongst the prominent benefactors was William Redehode, a rich London salter, who appears to have retired to Wycombe, and to have been a man of public spirit. St. Mary's Chapel, though belonging to the fraternity or guild of St. Mary, was, as before hinted, closely associated with the Corporation; had it been a chapel, the property of the Corporation, it would not have shared the fate of all free chapels and chantries, which were dissolved by the act of 1st Edw. VI. c. 14, but would have come under the exemption in that statute, which was "not to extend or be prejudicial or hurtful to any Corporation of any city, borough or town within the King's dominions."* St.

* *Ibid.* sec. 34.

Mary's was clearly a chapel belonging to a guild, but as Church and State were then closely connected, it may well have been associated with the Corporation. The Mayor and Corporation, it appears, provided a new manse in Frogmore for Sir John atte Stoke, chaplain of St. Mary, for which he was annually to render one red rose to the guild at midsummer. We are told that the Corporation attended the chapel of St. Mary's on their solemn law days, and on special occasions the chaplain was wont to preach a sermon. The same bell which summoned the Corporation to chapel, summoned them to their councils. The very priest of the chapel, if not the clerk to the Corporation, was the scribe who entered their records. He held his office during the pleasure of the corporate body, and his duties seem to have been divided between transcribing, and praying daily for the members of the guild.* The chapel is forgotten, but the priest's manse is still known as the Town House in All Hallows Lane, now called Churchside.

Since the publication of the "History of Wycombe" the peculiarities connected with St. Mary's Chapel have created some inquiries, as to the nature and position of free chapels and chantries amongst the readers of the volume; these inquiries may have been stimulated by the somewhat famous case relating to the Fitzalan chapel attached to the church of St. Nicholas, Arundel.† I propose therefore, to offer a few remarks on the subject of free chapels and chantries; and first as to the definition of those chapels. "Capella cometh from the French Chapelle, that is, *Ædícula*, and it is of two sorts, either adjoining to a church, as a porch of the same, which men of quality built *ut ibidem familiaria sepulchra sibi constituent*, or else separate from the mother church, commonly called a

* "History of Wycombe," p. 133.

† *Duke of Norfolk v. Arbutnots*, L. R. vol. 4, C. P. D., p. 291. This was a Collegiate Chapel, consisting of a warden and twelve seculars or chaplains. The structural peculiarity of this chapel is, its connection with the church of St. Nicholas; in fact, to all appearance it is the chancel of the church; but ecclesiastically, as decided by Lord Coleridge, and which decision has been confirmed in the Court of Appeal, it is entirely a separate building, having no connection with the parochial part of the edifice. There are instances of somewhat similar peculiarities, notably the French Protestant Chapel in Canterbury Cathedral, without pursuing the point further.

chapel-of-ease, for the ease of one or more parishioners that dwell too far from the church.”* Stavley says “the chapels contiguous to churches were as an addition to or parcel of the same, built by persons of wealth *ut ibi sepulchra vel sedes sibi et suis constituent.*”† Cowel’s definition of a free chapel, however, is as follows,—“Which seemeth to be such as hath maintenance perpetual towards the upholding thereof, and wages of the curate by some lands charitably bestowed on it, without the charge of the rector or parish.” See stat. 37 Hen. VIII. c. 4, 1 Edw. VI. c. 14. Another definition is, a chapel which is “free and exempt from all ordinary jurisdiction.”‡ The *Libera Capella* appears to be capable of two definitions. (1) Either that it was a chapel within a parish, founded by the devotion and liberality of some pious person, in addition to the mother church, to which the parishioners were free to come or not to come, and endowed with maintenance by the founder, and thereupon called free; or (2) (and this is considered the most probable definition,) “that those only are free chapels, that are of the King’s foundation, and by him exempted from the jurisdiction of the ordinary; but the King may license a subject to found such a chapel, and by his charter exempt it from the diocesan’s jurisdiction.”|| Burns in his Ecclesiastical Law quotes from “the learned and accurate” Bishop Tanner; he says, “Free chapels were places of religious worship, exempt from all ordinary jurisdiction * * * * Most of these chapels were built upon the manors and ancient demesnes of the Crown, whilst in the King’s hands, for the use of himself and retinue, when he came to reside there. And when the Crown parted with those estates, the chapels went along with them, and retained their first freedom.” Some, however, Tanner believes to have been built and privileged by grants from the Crown.§ It is important to remark that not only had these chapels the privilege of exemption from the jurisdiction of the ordinary, but the King might

* Cowel’s Law Dic.

† Stavley’s His. of Churches in England, p. 110 *et seq.*

‡ Wood’s Institutes, 31.

|| See Reg. Orig., fol. 40, 41.

§ Tanner’s Notit. Monast. Pref. 28. See also Gibson, 210.

license a subject to found such chapels.* Dr. Gibson says, however, that no instances are produced confirming this—"It is true that many free chapels have been in the hands of subjects, but it doth not therefore follow that these were not originally royal foundations."† By a constitution of Archbishop Stratford ministers who officiate in oratories or chapels, erected by the kings or queens of England, or their children, shall not need the license of the ordinary. The king himself by the Lord Chancellor or Lord Keeper visited all hospitals and free chapels, and not the ordinary.‡ But we shall not complete the definition we are upon without defining a chantry—*Cantaria*. "It was commonly a little chapel, or particular altar in some cathedral or parochial church, endowed with lands or revenues for the maintenance of a priest to pray for the souls of the founder and his friends."|| Burns tells us, that "a man might make a chantry by license of the king without the ordinary; for the ordinary hath nothing to do therewith." Chantries, therefore, be it observed, might be classed with free chapels, in being capable of exemption from the jurisdiction of the ordinary; an exemption which, we shall presently see, seems to have been naturally associated with the chapels or chantries of guilds.

The more we investigate the position of Guilds in the middle ages, the more are we struck with the important hold they then had on society. A Guild was an association for mutual help; it was not founded like monasteries and priories for men devoted to what were deemed religious exercises. Priests might belong to it, but the guild was a lay-body.¶ Its purposes might be the support of a church, the ringing of bells, the keeping up of records, or the encouragement of crafts and trades.§ M. Bentano, in treating on the history and development of Guilds, and whose treatise is incorporated in Toulmin Smith's work, divides his subject into three heads—the religious (or

* God. p. 145.

† Gibson, p. 211.

‡ God. p. 145.

|| Burns's "Ecclesiastical Law," vol. i. p. 213.

¶ See Toulmin Smith's "English Guilds," pp. 26 and 41.

§ In the ordinances of the Guild of the Holy Trinity of Cambridge it is expressly directed, that no priest shall have anything to do with the affairs of the Guild.

social) Guilds, the Town Guilds or guild merchants, and the Craft Guilds. The Guild at Wycombe would come more properly under the first classification. Now the duties of the religious or social guild would, he says, include "every exercise of Christian charity, and, therefore, above all things, mutual assistance of the guild brothers in every exigency, especially in old age, in sickness, in cases of impoverishment, if not brought on by their own folly, and in wrongful imprisonment, in losses by fire, water, or shipwreck, aid by loans, provision of work, and lastly the burial of the dead. It included further the assistance of the poor and sick, and the visitation and comfort of prisoners not belonging to the guild. And, as in the middle ages instruction and education were entirely supplied by the church, and were considered a religious duty, we find among the objects of religious guilds also the aid of poor scholars, the maintenance of schools, and the payment of schoolmasters." Such an enumeration of laudable objects would make us wish that our modern benefit societies should take a hint from similar institutions in our past history; true, the duties of some religious guilds would not commend themselves to this age; as an instance, in some statutes the only objects of the guilds were to stick candles on the altars of their patron saints, and before their images—true too, it would not be candid to pass over the ominous statutes, that occur against extravagant feasting and drinking bouts, and objectionable performances at their feasts; still it must be remembered, as M. Brentano says, "These fraternities were spread in the middle ages in great numbers over all countries under the sway of the Roman Catholic Church," and people of all ranks and conditions of life took part in these religious guilds, hence the obvious necessity of restrictive legislation.

Of the numerous objects of the various religious guilds, those of the Guild of the Lord's Prayer of York are certainly worthy of notice. It appears that a "Play setting forth the goodness of the Lord's Prayer was played in the city of York, in which play all manner of vices and sins were set up to scorn, and the virtues were held up to praise." This play much pleased the people of York, and the guild was founded to keep up the play. Amongst the ordinances of the guild, it is directed that the

brethren were bound "to make and as often as need be renew a table showing the whole meaning and use of the Lord's Prayer, and to keep this hanging against a pillar in the said Cathedral church." "Also they are bound, as often as the said play of the Lord's Prayer is played in the city of York, to ride with the players thereof through the chief streets of the city, and more becomingly to mark themselves, while thus riding, they must all be clad in one suit;" in other words, they were to be in "livery," a word which to this day is closely associated with guilds.

Processions and pageants were very popular in York. It appears that in 1415 ninety-six separate crafts joined in the procession of the Guild of Corpus Christi. In this procession some of the subjects presented were from the Old Testament, and some from the New, whilst some of the crafts bore blazing torches. In a MS. in the British Museum there is a list of names of brethren and sisters of the Guild of Corpus Christi, amounting to no less a number than 14,850.

With regard to the objects of the Guild of St. Mary's at Wycombe, they appear chiefly to have been to supply a priest to say mass for the souls of the brethren and sisters living and departed; and to carry out those objects the members contributed lands, or money, or charged their lands with small annual payments (called the Lady Rents), and supplied a house or chamber for the mass priest. Mr. Riley has given several translations from the deeds in the Historical Manuscripts Report relating to Wycombe, which bear out these facts, from some of which I have already quoted.

The Exeter Guild seems to have been a very similar one to that of Wycombe. The following is taken from Toulmin Smith's work, showing the Agreement of that guild. "This assembly was collected in Exeter for the love of God, and for our souls need, both in regard to our health in life here, and to the after days which we desire for ourselves by God's doom. Now we have agreed that our meeting shall be thrice in the twelvemonths * * * * and let the mass priest at each of our meetings sing two masses, one for living friends, the other for departed; and each brother of common condition two psalters of psalms, one for the living and one for the dead, and at the death of a brother each man six masses or six psalters of

psalms ; and at a death each man fivepence, and at a house-burning each man one penny." And after infliction of fines for neglects, and for "misgreeting" a brother, the agreement ends: "Now we pray for the love of God that every man hold this meeting rightly as we rightly have agreed upon it, God help us thereunto."

It appears that these guilds for the most part consisted equally of men and of women, "brethren and sistren." We have seen that they attracted people of all ranks of life, and I cannot forbear an apt quotation from Chaucer, for which I am indebted to the work just quoted. Speaking of pilgrims to Canterbury, who were all clothed in one livery, and were of the same guild, Chaucer says: "An haberdasher and a carpenter, a webbe, a deyer, and a tapiser were all y-clothed in o livere of a solempne and grete fraternite." But it is a striking fact that these religious guilds, like St. Mary's at Wycombe, and at Exeter, had their free chapel or chantry independent of parochial laws, free and untrammelled by the Bishop's authority, assuming that it was founded by the King ; and we can understand that with this freedom the chapel itself came to be looked upon as peculiarly the property of the laity ; at Wycombe it was even known as the Corporation Chapel.* As we have seen, frequent gifts of lands were bestowed for its maintenance, and the inventory of its ornaments discloses how lavishly the wealthier burghers enriched it with their offerings.

The connection between these free chapels and religious guilds opens out a subject of very great interest, a field yet to be explored by the antiquary ; it carries us back to the earliest formation of a Christian community, when Rome was yet master of the world, and her ancient worship was still in the ascendant ; it reminds us of the first efforts of a seemingly feeble brotherhood to unite together for common objects of the highest moment. With these observations the writer regretfully passes from a

* There are numerous instances of the close relationship between Corporations and Guilds. The municipal body in the city of Worcester is often spoken of as the "yeld" or "yield Marchant." ("The Ordinances of Worcester.") There was an intimate connection between the Craft Guilds and the Corporate body of the city of Bristol, the mayor of that city was possessed of a ministerial function in confirming the election of the masters of the Crafts. (No. 16, Articles of "The Office of the Mayor of Bristol.")

subject, which could only be effectively handled by one who has unlimited resources and leisure at his command, merely to add a few remarks on the confiscation of these chapels, and the consequent partial dismemberment of guilds in the reign of Edward VI.

The secret of the acquiescence of the nation in the spoliation of these chapels and their lands was no doubt the unpopularity that had grown around the doctrine of purgatory. The Acts of 37th Henry VIII. c. 4, and 1st Edward VI. c. 14, and particularly the latter Act, doomed "free chappelles, chauntries, hospitalles, fraternities, brotherhedd and guylde." The London guilds were only saved by being trading guilds, and, with the exception of such guilds, the possessions of all others became vested in the Crown. There was not the same plea for the confiscation of guilds, as there was for the suppression of the monasteries. Many must have had, if their rules were at all conscientiously carried out, a beneficial influence on the community among whom they were established. Notably was this the case with the Palmers of Ludlow, one of those guilds that proves the antiquity of the institution, for we find that by the letters patent of 3rd Edw. III., confirming all that this guild had done, they speak of the guild as existing *ab antiquo*. Now this guild of the Palmers, in common with others, evidently revised its ordinances from time to time, so as to become more useful; and it must have been difficult for the commissioners appointed in 1546 to report on this guild, to give the reason for its confiscation, for we find that at the time of the reports the guild had, among other things, established a school with a well-salaried schoolmaster.

No doubt much of the indignation, which is expressed in reference to the wholesale plunder, that took place in the reigns of Henry VIII. and Edward VI., is just: useful institutions were despoiled to gratify the rapacity of greedy courtiers; but it is only true to say, that many of the possessions of the guilds went to the founding of grammar schools, as was ostensibly the intention. Notably such was the case at Bury St. Edmunds, Spillesby, Louth, Shrewsbury, East Retford, and Birmingham, without adding further to the lists.*

* See Strype's Mem., tom. ii., p. 535; Rapin, vol. ii., p. 10, note 8.

The proceeds of the sale of the furniture of the Chapel of St. Mary, at Wycombe, were applied towards the erection of four almshouses adjoining the Royal Grammar School. The lands and possessions of the guild of St. Mary, called the Lady Rents, were by letters patent of Queen Elizabeth, granted to the mayor, bailiffs, and burgesses, towards the support and maintenance of this grammar school and four poor persons. The school and the almshouses were erected on the site of the Hospital of St. John of Jerusalem, and with a few remarks on this hospital I will conclude this paper.

The hospital was founded in the twelfth century, and one of the objects at Wycombe most interesting to the antiquary, will be the ancient hall, supposed to have been built in 1175. The house of the master of the grammar school is built among the remains of this Norman pile. A fine massive pillar, taking us back in thought to the days of our Plantagenet kings, to the age of art rudely but surely developing into the beauty and grace of Early Gothic, stands in the centre of what is now the master's kitchen, a semi-circular arch is seen on ascending the stairs to the upper rooms; but we have an accurate description of the hall in the "History of Wycombe," from which I now quote.

"It was about sixty-two feet long, and appears to have consisted of a nave sixteen feet wide between the pillars, and side-aisles six feet wide, and stood, or rather stands, nearly north and south. There were three pillars on each side of the nave, alternately round and octagonal, supporting four plain semi-circular arches, thirteen feet in diameter * * * * Of the six pillars four remain; they are about two feet in diameter, eight and a-half feet high, including the capitals, which are ornamented with sculptured foliage and shells; and on one of them is a dragon, which has unfortunately lost its head. One pillar has disappeared entirely; of another the capital only remains, supported by a brick wall."

The present state of the arches is then described.

"The entrance to the hall is at the south end fronting the street; and some years since, on the plaster at the entrance being removed, four small transitional Norman capitals were discovered supporting a pointed receding arch; the shafts were gone, but have now been re-

stored.”* The building at the east side of the hall, which has for many years been used as the schoolroom, was either the refectory or more probably the chapel of the hospital ; it is twenty-four feet long by twenty-one wide. This building is of later date than the hall, there is nothing Norman about it ; it still has one lancet and one decorated window in the north wall, which formed parts of the earlier building. We are told that the establishment consisted of a master and poor brethren and sisters, who were appointed by the burgesses, on the ground of poverty and sickness, the mayor and burgesses being the patrons of the hospital. The brethren and sisters took vows of chastity and obedience. The freehold in the hospital lands was vested in the master for life, who was always a clerk in holy orders.

After the dissolution, the hospital appears to have passed into private hands ; it is doubtful whether a grammar school, though established in the reign of Edward VI., continued during the reign of Mary. Early in the reign of Elizabeth, the mayor and burgesses manifested a zeal and activity in obtaining the establishment of the grammar school on a royal foundation. On the 21st July, 1562, as a reward of their exertions, the queen, by letters patent, granted to the mayor and burgesses and their successors for ever the hospital and its lands, and also the rents which had belonged to the Fraternity of the Blessed Mary, and called the Lady Rents, being the guild I have previously remarked upon, the rents and revenues to be applied to the Royal Grammar School and four poor persons ; by a charter of James I. the grant to the poor was augmented.

In the necessarily limited space allotted to a paper, I have been unable to do more than to call the reader's attention to a few interesting points, among the many, which naturally demand attention in the long annals of so ancient a borough town as Wycombe. To attempt to write its history meant the devotion of hours of patient research, and accurate and conscientious investigation, evidences of which are given throughout the pages of the “History of Wycombe,” rendering the volume an important book of reference for years to come. Thus

* “History of Wycombe,” p. 139.

much the writer feels that it will not be considered unbecoming in him to say. The book appropriately closes with sketches of the lives of eminent characters of Wycombe, worthies who have left their mark and passed away. The signs of the vitality of the old town, the increase of its staple manufacture, the extension of the borough itself, all point to a future history, which may perhaps surpass in interest its former annals, but the records of the past will be no unimportant guide to a coming generation.
