

ETON COLLEGE.

[A pathetic interest attaches to these notes, inasmuch as they were compiled by the late Senior Hon. Sec. in order to be read during the visit of the Society to the College on July 18, 1906. Somewhat ailing when he put them together, he was prevented from reading them on the intended day, which proved to be the last occasion on which his fellow members saw him, by the exhaustion that almost prostrated him before mid-day, and later on compelled him to give up the struggle to keep with the party, and to make the best of his way home alone, leaving so quietly and unobtrusively that only one or two members were at first aware of his departure.—A. H. C.]

In the few remarks that I propose to make with reference to Eton College, I shall almost entirely confine myself to a slight account of the buildings of the College, and more particularly of the Chapel.

The pious Founder, Henry VI., established the College by his Charter of Foundation dated 11th October, 1440, "to endure to all time to the praise, glory, and honour of our Crucified Lord, to the exaltation of the most Blessed Virgin Mary His Mother, and the support of the Holy Church His Bride, to be called the King's College of our Lady of Eton beside Windsor."

The Founder sketched out a constitution of the College which was originally intended by him to consist of a Provost, 10 Fellows, 4 Clerks, 6 Choristers, a Schoolmaster, 25 poor and indigent scholars, and the same number of poor and infirm men, but the Alms-houses were suppressed during the Founder's own lifetime.

A great deal of the property acquired for the College was obtained from the suppression of the alien priories.

All the building accounts of John Hampton, the Surveyor of the Works, have been preserved among the muniments at Eton. His journal commences on the 3rd July, 1441.

Very interesting light is thrown on the manner in which the works proceeded, on the number of men employed, the wages paid, and the rules observed in carrying on the works. Common labourers were paid at the rate of 4d. per day. The Schools were opened in 1442, and William of Waynesfleet, afterwards Bishop of Winchester, was practically the first master.

The dimensions of successive plans of the Church as given by the Founder are shown in three documents—(1) the King's will, dated 11th March, 1447-8; (2) an undated manuscript, with measurements of greater extent than those in the first plan; the third a paper at Eton not signed, but expressly styled "The Kinges owne Voyse," which contains the measurements evidently intended by the King to be adopted for his Collegiate Church. These measurements I give:—

Total length of Choir.....	150 ft.
Breadth of Choir	40 „
Length of Nave and Aisles	168 „
Breadth of Nave.....	40 „
Breadth of each Aisle	20 „
Length of High Altar	18 „
Height of Battlements of Choir above-ground	80 „
Height of Pinnacles of Choir above-ground	100 „
Number of Lights in Great Eastern Window	9
Number of Lights to each Side Window of Choir	5
Number of Windows on each side of Choir	8
Number of Bays in Nave	8

This shows a much larger nave than intended by the earlier plans. The existing Chapel is only the choir of the intended Church, and corresponds closely with that ordered in the "Kinges owne Voyse," with the additions at the West End to be hereafter mentioned.

The area of the great quadrangle was to measure 155 feet North and South from the gateway to the Hall, and 230 feet East and West, so that it would be more

than three times the size of the cloisters which now occupy part of the site intended for this quadrangle.

The buildings surrounding were to have windows above the ground, and a series of small projecting towers on both sides. Many of the towers were to serve as staircases to the upper rooms, which were only accessible in this manner.

The library was to be situated on the east side of the quadrangle looking over the gardens to the river. The hall and pantry were to occupy the position on the south side which they still retain. The provost's lodging was to extend for a length of 70 feet on both floors, from behind the upper end of the Hall to a corner tower situated close to the North-east angle of the new Church. Exactly opposite, but only on the ground floor, was to be the Schoolroom of similar length adjoining the gateway.

As I have said, the document containing what is styled the "Kinges own Voyse" is the only real clue to the shape which the Church, so far as the original plans have been carried out, has actually assumed. The length and breadth of the present Choir correspond with those ordered by the Founder, as also do the buttresses and the eight windows of five lights apiece on either side.

Had the Church as originally intended by the King been erected, there are only two Churches now in England which surpass King Henry's last design in width, one being the Cathedral of York and the other St. Paul's Cathedral.

King's College Chapel, Cambridge, is a much larger building than the existing choir of Eton, but if both structures had been carried out to their common founder's last design the nave of Eton would have been thirty feet longer than that of King's, though not exceeding it in breadth.

The Hall was available for use as early as 1448, and it is recorded that about that date nearly 200 feet of glass were provided for the windows, and a high table was purchased.

On the deposition of Henry and the accession of Edward IV. to the throne, a sad contrast is exhibited in considering the condition of the College. The

College revenues, which once amounted to about £1,500 a year, by 1466 sunk to £370. However, brighter days came, for the building of the new College Church appears to have been resumed in 1470, under the auspices of Bishop Waynefleet.

Leland expressly states that a considerable portion of the building of Eton College, left imperfect by King Henry, was finished by the liberality of Waynefleet. The Audit Rolls fully corroborate this, and show that the College appealed to the Bishop for money several times every year.

No separate accounts of the time of Edward IV. have been preserved at Eton, but the walls of the Church bear evidence of the exact stage at which Waynefleet resumed the work. "A sudden break in the mouldings," Maxwell Light remarks, "round the curved head of the great east window is noticeable from without as well as from within." "It proves that the arch was intended to have been more acute, and that consequently the whole building was to have been loftier." The lower pitch of the present arch was more in accordance with the prevalent (Perpendicular) style at the time of the resumption of the work. Waynefleet was an old man when he resumed the work, and he had to abandon the Founder's scheme for erecting the vast nave proposed, and to substitute for it the small structure which would conveniently accommodate the parishioners. Thus the origin of the westernmost portion of the present building, formerly called the nave, but now the ante-chapel, is apparent. This ante-chapel is built of Headington stone, and has the appearance of greater antiquity than the Choir, to be accounted for by the fact that the material of the Choir was from Yorkshire quarries, and Headington stone is known to decay rapidly.

When the interior of the building was undergoing restoration some few years ago, traces were found of a lofty arch which had originally been designed to separate the Choir from the nave. The present arch and window over it were evidently erected in the reign of Edward IV.

The frescoes are concealed from view by the canopies of the stalls. "There was originally a double row of

paintings on the north and south walls of the Choir, each row being divided longitudinally into 17 compartments alternately wide and narrow. The former contained historical compositions, the latter single figures of Saints represented as standing in canopied niches. Most of these saints may be identified by their emblems. Under each of the large compartments there was a Latin inscription explaining the subject of the picture, and giving a reference to the book whence its story was derived. No less than six of the compartments were occupied by scenes from the life of a mythical Roman Empress. Mr. G. E. Street, writing in 1847, had no hesitation in saying that "these paintings are the finest which have yet been discovered in England, most artistic and full of religious feeling." Maxwell Light expresses the opinion, possibly from his communication with experts, that the work was executed by or under the direction of Flemish artists. The Audit Rolls enable the date of their execution to be fixed with tolerable certainty, the entries about them ranging between 1479 and 1487.

Just one word on the College Library. It seems to have been sadly neglected till the time of Sir Henry Saville, who became Provost of Eton in the time of Queen Elizabeth. Saville persuaded the Fellows of his time of the desirability of increasing the collection of books, and year after year the College accounts record large payments for the purchase of books; the London dealers were eager, it is said, to secure such excellent customers, and used to tempt the Authorities to further outlay by allowing them a discount of 20 per cent. Saville seems to have borrowed his plans for the repair and improvement of the library by employing someone to view the library at Oxford, then lately founded by Sir Thomas Bodley, a library which must have been the great admiration of the savants of the period.

I am indebted to Mr. Maxwell Lyte's "History of Eton College," 1877, for the information which this paper affords.

JOHN PARKER.