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OF THE
Architectural, Archæological,
AND
Historic Society,
FOR THE
COUNTY, CITY, AND NEIGHBOURHOOD OF
Chester.

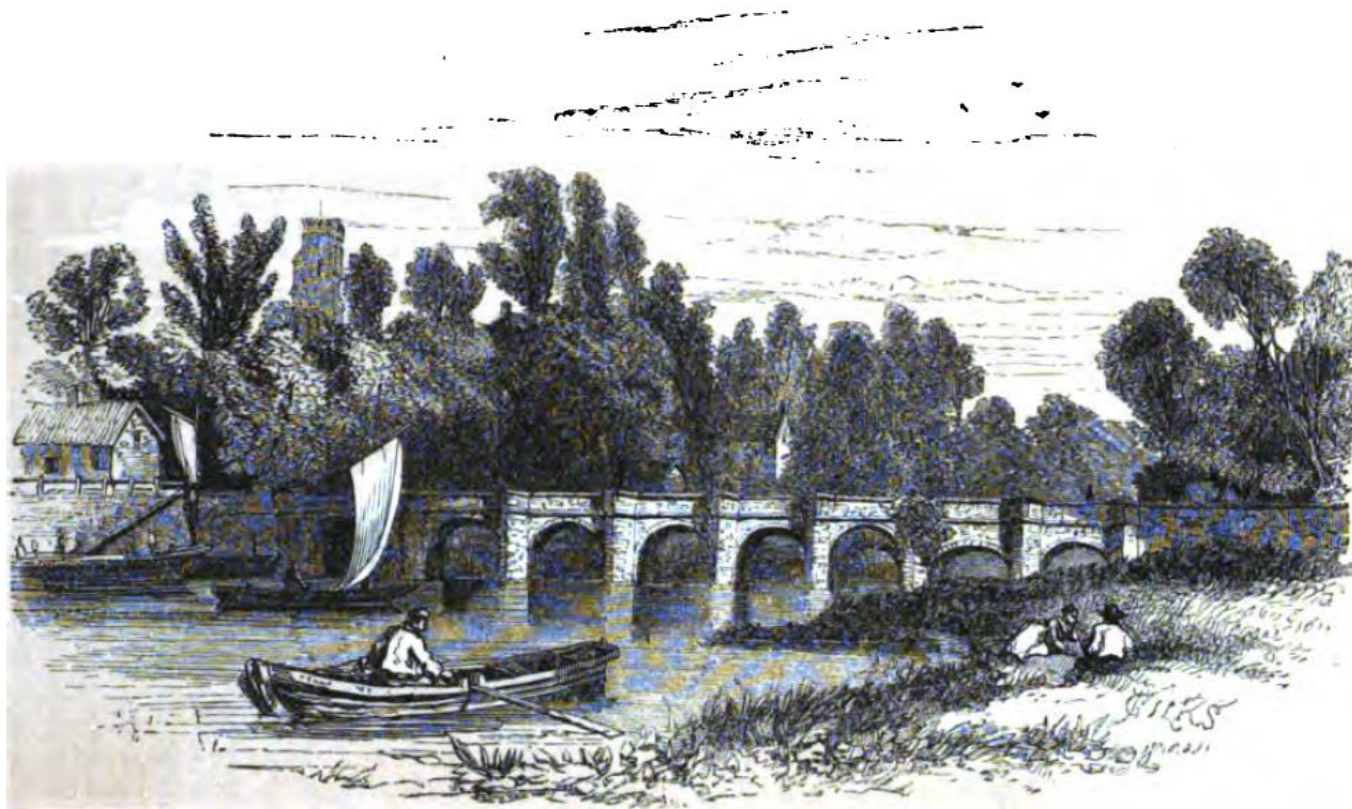
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MDCCCLVII.



Engraved from an original Sketch

by Thomas Gilks.

HOLT BRIDGE, CHESHIRE.

On Friday, July 14th, the annual excursion of this Society was taken, the places selected for visiting being Farndon, Holt, Aldford, Eaton Hall and Eccleston. At 10 30 a.m. a party of fifty ladies and gentlemen embarked on board the convenient steam-boat which plies upon the Dee above the Causeway, under the command of "Captain" Kemp, and proceeded most pleasantly along the softly flowing river, which develops a charming succession of scenes of rural beauty, to the Iron Bridge of Eaton Park, when rain set in; and the voyage to Farndon was continued amidst heavy showers, which prevented the enjoyment of the picturesque prospects in the neighbourhood.

About one o'clock, the steamer was moored near the fine old Bridge of that village, which, with the tower of Farndon Church on the one hand and Holt Church on the other, and its ivy-clad rocks in the back ground, form a rich and charming picture of historic interest. * The Bridge was

* The accompanying illustration of Holt Bridge is a present to the Society from Thomas Baines, Esq. of Liverpool, who is about shortly to publish a serial work on the History of Lancashire and Cheshire, with engravings similar to that which embellishes the present notice.

built in the reign of Edward the Third ; and in the centre are the remains of the gateway and tower, which formerly divided England and Wales. Pennant says that " the date 1345 was preserved till very lately on a stone over what is called the Lady's Arch." Farndon and Holt being built on the opposite banks of the River Dee, which is there but a narrow stream, present the appearance to the spectator of being the same town. John Speed, the historian, was a native of Farndon, where he was born in 1552.

The manor of Farndon belonged at the period of the Domesday survey to the Bishoprick of Lichfield, which diocese then included Cheshire ; and it is now held under lease from that See by the family of Barnston of Churton, now represented by Major Roger H. Barnston, of Crewe Hill, one of the heroes of the Crimea. A younger brother of this gentleman, Captain William Barnston, also fought and bled for his country in the same arduous campaign.

Farndon Church was first visited ; it is of very old foundation, being mentioned in Domesday, under the name of Forentone, as existing prior to the Conquest. The tower is good, and the eastern basement of the north chancel, together with some of the internal arches of the nave, are probably of Edward the Third's reign, at which time the Bridge was also built. None of the original Norman structure remains in view, and most of the outer walls and windows are subsequent even to the Reformation. There are, however, no galleries to obstruct improvements, and the lofty arches of the nave would ensure a general good effect, if the Church were to be thoroughly restored.

The Church yet contains some of those modern abominations—high enclosed pews, fitted up with tables, lounging seats, and curtains,—as if to screen off the occupants from " the people," and destroy the very notion of " common prayer." We were glad, however, to observe that a good work of restoration had commenced ; a large pulpit had been removed from its unsightly position in front of the east window ; the chancel was undergoing repairs and improvement, an open oak roof had been constructed, an appropriate new pulpit of good design had been placed on the south side of the arch, and a reading desk at the opposite corner ; and several stalls of good ecclesiastical pattern were to be introduced. These improvements in the chancel have been effected at the cost of the Marquis of Westminster, who is lay Rector of the parish. The Church was burned by the Parliamentary army during the siege of Holt Castle, and re-built after the calamities of the " Great Rebellion,"—a fact confirmed by an old written paper found in the Church in an excellent state of preservation, which was handed to us for transcribing, and which runs thus :—" This Church being ruined by fire, 1645, was repaired, and the bells all cast 1658, and was beautified by George Clubb and Hugh Maddock, Church Wardens, 1681." In a small gallery at the west end there is an organ, which was once a barrel organ,

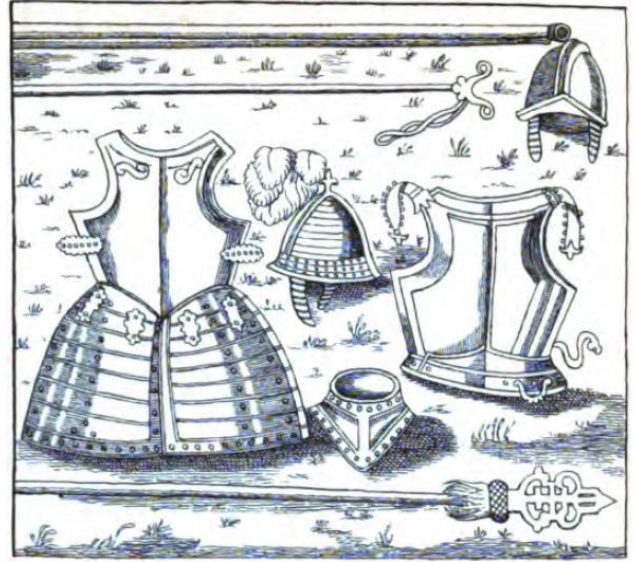
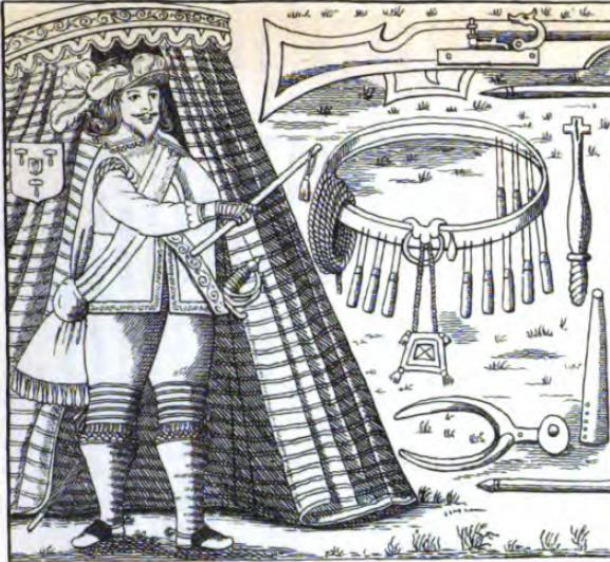
but keys have been ingeniously introduced by the village blacksmith, who plays upon it during Divine service,—an observation which immediately induced from one of the party the appropriate witticism, that the skilful mechanic must be "*The Harmonious Blacksmith.*"

A south chapel has always belonged to the Barnstons, who now also occupy the northern chapel, having received it from the Massies, of Coddington, with an exchange of certain lands. In a window of this chapel is an interesting little frame of stained glass, representing men at arms, and various officers of the time of Charles the First; Sir Francis Gamul (whose tomb is in St. Mary's, Chester,) occupying the chief compartment. Sir Francis was one of the three who stood by the side of King Charles on the leads of the Phoenix Tower, Chester, to watch the mortifying conflict on Rowton Moor. Charles created him a Baronet for his loyalty; but owing to the perilous times, the patent was never registered. The shields also indicate one figure as a Grosvenor, another as a Mainwaring, a third as a Barnston, and a fourth, hitherto unknown, but which is certainly Berrington, the standard bearer, whose shield of three greyhounds is carved on an oak above a mantel-piece in Castle-street, Chester.

We must not omit to mention also that there is an ancient monument recently recovered from its interment under ground, and now placed erect at the west end of the Church; it is a figure in chain armour and *chapeau de fer*, of about the date of Edward III., though many might take it to be more antique from its workmanship. The inscription round the heater-shaped shield is "*Hic jacet Patriceius de Bartun—O'P'EO.*" i. e. "*Orate pro eo.*"—pray for him.

On leaving Farndon, the visitors passed from Cheshire into Denbighshire, by walking over the Bridge to the ancient town of Holt, which in days of yore was a place of considerable celebrity and importance, though now wearing the aspect of a dilapidated municipality.

Holt Church is capacious, on much the same ground plan and general character externally as Gresford, though the tower is older, and the ornamentation not near so rich. The internal arches of the nave are very highly pointed, and apparently of much older date than those at Farndon. The tracery of the windows is perpendicular, of the four-centred Tudor style, to which most of the other features have originally corresponded, but appear to have been renewed far more recently, much of the parapet and other parts betraying the good intention of what is called "the debased period." Still the Church is substantial, and is capable, like Farndon, of being made a noble edifice for congregational purposes, under favourable auspices and a judicious hand. The columns of the chancel have been restored in the fluted style, and the capital of the eastern half-pillar set not above it, but on one side, has been *said* to indicate that the Bishop of the diocese died, or was translated during the progress of the work. There



H. J. Beale del.

SIR FRANCIS GAMUL, BART.
MAYOR OF CHESTER, 1634.

From the centre compartment of a Painted Window in Parndon Church, Cheshire.

is a very curious old brass in this Church, of the date A.D. 1666, fixed in the northern wall near the east end ; it records the following inscription, which is of a better purport than many of that period of epitaphic puffery :—

“ The life of man, imperfect from the wombe,
 Hasteneth both day and night unto the tombe ;
 Of mortal life when once the thread is spanne,
 Man has a life immortal then begunne ;
 A wise man dying lives and living dies ;
 Such was ye man yt here entombed lies :
 Carefull he lived God's sacred lawes to keepe
 Religiously, until yt death or sleepe
 Vnto a happy life his soul did bring,
 Ending this life to live with Xt. our King.”
“ Stipendium Peccati Mors.”

Under the inscription is a recumbent skeleton, with the motto—

“ Hodie Mihi, Cras Tibi.”

and a record of the date of the death of the deceased, but not his name, which is indicated, after the fashion of those times, by an acrostic of the verse above, “ Thomas Crve,”—Thomas Crewe. The tablet is surmounted by armorial bearings, supported by pedestals, at the top of which is engraved “ *Fugit Hora.*”

During the troubles of the civil wars in the reign of Charles the First, the troops of Brereton's army are said to have stabled their horses in Holt Church ; and some curious traditions are extant in the town as to the capricious excesses by which they signalized their contempt for consecrated edifices. The windows were originally filled with stained glass, some fragments of which are still discernible. From the Church the party proceeded to the remains of Holt Castle, which are very scanty, and but of slight interest now, for modern spoilers have completed what desolating conquerors began ; and a few stone walls of an old tower are all that is left of the departed strength and glory of this ancient fortress. Pennant, in his “ *Tours in Wales,*” gives a curious old picture and ground plan of the building, which he thus describes :—

“ The poor reliques of the Castle are seated close to the river ; and are insulated by a vast foss cut through a deep bed of soft red stone ; which seems originally to have been thus quarried for the building of the Castle. This fortress consisted of five bastions, and the work cut into that form, to serve as a base to as many towers. An antient survey I met with in the Museum, among the Harleian MSS. taken in 1620 by John Norden, when it was entire, will give a true idea of this curious structure. It had been defended in three parts by the great chasm formed by the quarry ; on the fourth by the Dee, into which jutted a great quay, still to be seen in very dry seasons ; for it has long since been covered by the encroachment of the river.”

"Originally this place had been a small outpost to Deva. Slopes, and other now almost obsolete works, may be seen near the Castle, and on the opposite side of the water; and coins have been found here, that put the matter out of doubt. I have seen some of Antoninus, Gallienus, Constantinus, and Constantius. I conjecture that the Roman name had been *Castra Legionis*, and the Welsh, *Castell Lleon*, or the castle of the legion: because it was garrisoned by a detachment of the legion stationed at Chester. The English borderers might easily mistake *Lleon* for the plural of *Llew*, which signifies a lion, and so call it the Castle of Lions; as we find it styled when it came into possession of Earl Warren and his successors.

"This country formed part of Powysland; which, when entire, reached in a straight line from Broxton hills in Cheshire, southerly to Pengwern Powys, or Shrewsbury, including a large tract in both these counties; from thence through the eastern limits of Montgomeryshire, comprehending all that county, part of Radnorshire and Brecknockshire; then turning northward, included the cwmwds of Mowddwy, Edeirnion, and Glyndyfrdwy. Merionethshire, and (circuiting part of Denbighshire) came along part of the Clwydian hills, to the summit of Moel-famma, including all Denbighshire, excepting those parts which at present constitute the lordships of Denbigh and Ruthin; from hence, taking a south-easterly direction to Broxton hills, asserted its right to Molesdale, Hopedale, and Maelor, in Flintshire. I have before taken notice, that Offa's encroachment was but temporary, and of short duration. I must farther observe, that in our articles of pacification between Henry III. and our last prince Llewellyn, the limits of the principality experienced but a very small diminution from what it was in Offa's time, when it was agreed that the Dee should be the boundary from Wirral to *Castrum Leonum*, or Holt; and from thence in a direct line to Pengwern Powys."

"It was, perhaps, of much greater extent under the reign of Brochwel Ysgythrog, who was defeated by the Saxons at the battle of Chester."

Poor as was Holt Castle in Pennant's days, it is poorer now, for no care seems to have been taken to protect the ruins, portions of which are visible as forming boundary walls and outbuildings in different parts of the town: still these memorials of former days are not without their interest, as suggestive of important historical associations, and may serve in many respects to "point a moral" for the reflective patriot, if not to "adorn a tale" for the lover of romance.

The Rev. R. W. Bagot and Mr. Owen of Farndon, and the Mayor of Holt kindly joined the excursionists to point out objects of interest, and to communicate local information.

The appointed time for leaving Holt having arrived, the party re-embarked, and the boat steamed on her homeward trip; the rain, however,

which had occasionally abated, now set in with most persevering earnestness, and continued to fall so heavily that the intended visit to Aldford Church was abandoned. On reaching the Iron Bridge, therefore, where it had been intended ("weather permitting") to enjoy a collation at the pretty cottage on the banks of the river, the excursionists landed and walked to Eaton Hall, in one of the newly-finished coach-houses of which mansion Mr. Allen, Lord Westminster's superintendent, had kindly arranged that the dinner might be served. Here, accordingly, under comfortable shelter from the pelting showers, the tables were set, and an excellent repast was provided for a party of fifty-three by Mr. Bolland, of Eastgate Row, with his usual good taste and liberality as a purveyor. The Mayor of Chester (Mr. J. Smith) presided, Mr. Hicklin officiating as vice-president. During the collation the toasts of "The Queen and the Ladies," "The Prince and the Gentlemen," and "The Marquis and Marchioness of Westminster," were duly proposed and honoured; and thanks were gratefully tendered to Mr. Allen for the kind consideration with which he had promoted the comfort of the party. Dinner having been discussed, the visitors proceeded to the interior of Eaton Hall, and the various alterations and embellishments of that princely mansion, with its splendid architecture, its fine pictures, its noble statuary, and elegant adornments, were examined with lively interest and admiration.

Unfortunately the weather continued too wet for the party to promenade the gardens, or to examine the peculiar alterations and marked improvements in the exterior of the Hall, which would properly fall within the investigations of a Society claiming to be "Architectural," as well as "Archæological and Historic." After leaving the Hall, the pitiless rain forbade the intended walk to Eccleston Church; and so the party adjourned to the steamer, which brought them safely back to Chester about half-past eight o'clock.

A more friendly and happy meeting was never enjoyed, so far as relates to the character and disposition of the party; but no archæologists, though as old as King Canute, can control the elements. The weather was sadly unfortunate, for with a balmy breeze and a bright sun, a more agreeable excursion could not be devised; but the prevailing temper was one of unalloyed kindness and goodwill, and served to illustrate the truth of somebody's observation that the light of woman's smiles can cheer the gloomiest day, for the good humour with which the ladies braved all the disappointments and discomforts of the weather, rendered even a wet day on the river enjoyable. The unavoidable absence of Mr. Massie, the Ecclesiastical Secretary, from ill health, was a subject of general regret.

A Supplemental Excursion was afterwards made, August 2, to the same localities, and a pleasant trip enjoyed by many Members and friends of the Society, who were unable to be present at the original gathering.