

After luncheon the company paid a visit to St. Mary's Church, an interesting description of which was given by Mr. EDMUND BUCKLE. He said it was quite impossible to look at the church with any attention at all without feeling what an important place Bridgwater was in olden times. The church was really larger than it gave one the impression of being, and he believed that it seated something like 1,300 people. It was not surprising that Bridgwater should require a church of that size now, but it was really surprising that as far back as they could go there appeared to have been as large a church as the present one. There was nothing of Norman work left; but the foundations of the Early English building extended all the way round the north aisle, and along the end of the north transept. That appeared to make it plain that in the thirteenth century there was a cruciform church with aisles and nave of the same width as the existing ones. Mr. BUCKLE then pointed out the great width of the building across the nave and aisles, and remarked that in the thirteenth century it would have been unusual to find so wide a church. In the time of King John there was founded a hospital of Augustinian Canons in Bridgwater, and the church was appropriated to these canons, who served it partly themselves and partly by a secular chaplain. The only serious additions to the size of the church made since the thirteenth century, appeared to be the filling out of the space between the transepts and the north and south porches, and additions at the east end. The two side chapels were probably added later, and the chancel carried at least one bay further east than it was at the time of that Early English church. Mr. BUCKLE pointed out the early niches for monuments in the north aisle wall and also the piece of thirteenth century work in the north door, which, however, was not *in situ*. The tracery between the lintel and the arch marked the date at which this doorway was rebuilt in its present position in the outer wall of the north porch. Very little alteration had taken place in the general appearance of the church, except as regarded the removal of the cross arches from the centre of the church and the raising of the nave. The windows were of all sorts of dates. There were Geometric-al windows, Decorated windows, and

windows with reticulated tracery. In the north aisle they found the internal arch of the old windows remaining, whilst the windows themselves had Perpendicular tracery inserted all through. The arches of the Perpendicular arcade varied a great deal in width, and the capital of one pair of pillars dropped down quite a foot below the others. Another remarkable fact was that the clerestory windows were not over the arches but over the pillars. The old rood screen was now utilised as side-choir screens, and a remarkable thing was that in olden time there was in front of the rood screen another screen some six or eight feet forward. This was a Jacobean screen, which now formed the front of the Corporation pew, and the mayor and corporation seemed to have been provided with stalls, placed between the two screens. Altogether the church must have been wonderfully rich in carved work, because the whole of the front of the stall work in the chancel was filled out with panels of ancient carved work. The pulpit was a pretty one, of Perpendicular date, and formerly stood against one of the pillars down the nave. Mr. Buckle spoke of the arrangement of the squint from the north porch. The view of the high altar from this porch was obtained by a four-light window opening from the porch into the church, a squint through the west wall of the transept (which wall has, in 1849, been replaced by an arcade), and another squint through the pier of the chancel arch. The purpose of these squints was generally supposed to be to provide for lepers. With regard to the furniture the most conspicuous thing was the picture presented to the church by Mr. Anne Poulet, who was christened Anne after Queen Anne, and was at that time member for Bridgwater. Beyond that fact no history of the picture was known, but it was generally ascribed to an Italian artist, Annibale Caracci, of Bologna. There were at one time at least seven altars in the church, as had been discovered by Mr. Weaver.\* These were the High altar, Trinity altar, Our Lady's altar, St. George's altar, the Rood altar, St. Katharine's altar, and St. Sunday's altar, and there appeared also to have been an altar to St. Erasmus. There was ample room for seven altars, and there might very well have been more. There were three chantries — of St. George, Our Lady, and the Holy Trinity, and there

were seven guilds in connection with the church. All these things pointed to the great richness and importance of the town. The small arch leading into the tower showed that at the time it was built there was no clerestory. The tower was a massive building, consisting almost solely of rubble stone work, without any free-stone where it could be avoided. Towers of this character prevail in West Somerset and part of Devon. The tower in contrast to the church showed poverty, but it had really a remarkable spire, being a great deal taller than the tower on which it stood, and it gave an individual character to the appearance of the building.

Lieut.-Col. BRAMBLE spoke of the resemblance between St. Mary's tower and the tower of old Bedminster church, now pulled down. As to the roof it was of a style peculiar to Somerset, which had got to be known as Somerset waggon roof. There they had a Somerset waggon roof as a nucleus and a great deal besides.

The Rev. J. E. ODGERS spoke of the ceremonies which formerly took place in the church between Good Friday and Easter day. A sepulchre was set up in the church, and watchers were appointed until the Sunday, when a curtain was drawn back revealing the figure of the rising Saviour.

Mr. CHARLES MAJOR and Dr. WINTERBOTHAM also spoke. The latter dissented from the view of Mr. Buckle that the altar piece belonged to the Italian school. He considered it was a specimen of the Flemish school. It was said to have been taken from a privateer, and it had been inspected and valued by Sir Joshua Reynolds.

It was mentioned that the Corporation annually insured the picture for £10,000.

The Rev. H. BIRCHAM, vicar, said that the registers were very interesting indeed, and Mr. Lockyer, the Parish Clerk, would have great pleasure in showing them the Communion plate as well. The chancel, he added, did not belong to the Corporation, they were only lay rectors. With regard to the picture he did not believe that that belonged to them either. It had been there many years, and he doubted their having the slightest power over it, although he did not want to reopen the question.

The Rev. F. W. WEAVER said the churchwardens' accounts, which belonged to the Corporation, went back to 1368, and were some of the most interesting in the West of England.

\* See *Downside Review*, December, 1896.

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