

GENERAL MEETING.—HITCHAM, BILDESTON, AND
CHELSWORTH, *September 7, 1882.*

The members of this Society had an excursion on Thursday, Sept. 7th. The places announced to be visited were Hitcham and Bildeston, and also the church of Chelsworth, if time permitted. Conveyances met the train at Stowmarket at 11.25, and the party drove to Hitcham church, where they were received by the rector, the Rev. Canon Grant, who said the church evidently belonged to the period of great church-building activity in this county—that is to say, the 15th century. He found no trace of any earlier building. It would be remarked, however, that the part of the churchyard which lies to the north of the church had evidently been a very old burial ground. That part of the churchyard was not in use when he first came there, and it had been actually consecrated by Bishop Turton not very long before, under the idea that it was a new piece of ground. For some time no graves were dug, as there seemed to be a prejudice against graves on the north side. When, however, the south side became full, he insisted upon graves being dug on the north side, and in every case where the ground had been opened, very early remains had been found. The earliest part of the present church was the chancel, dating from the 14th century. This, however, only applied to the north wall, as the east and south walls were taken down and re-built at the restoration, retaining as nearly as possible the style of the original building. The south wall was very much out of the perpendicular. The east wall was in very bad repair, and the window was in a very debased style. The remains of the old window were found built up in the east wall, and this was very much in the style of the window which now replaced it. The nave belonged to the 15th century. The arches, pillars and clerestory were of the early part of the century. The walls of the aisles were probably of the same date, but the windows were later. The tower was probably of early 15th century work. A remarkable feature about it was that the eastern buttresses rise from the floor of the nave, and overlap the western arches thereof. This peculiarity was also found in Cockfield church, which had a general resemblance to this. There was a still more remarkable example in Bramford church, where the buttresses of the tower cut off nearly half of the adjacent arches. There was an appearance on these buttresses of having been at one time exposed to the weather, which would lead to the conclusion that the present aisles were built up to the tower. The roof of the nave was of the 15th century, with additions of much later date. The lower part of it had been mutilated by the defacing of all the figures. It would appear, then, that at the end of the 15th century the church externally was much what it was now. Subsequent to that time there was evidently a destruction of all carved human figures, no doubt as being superstitious. They might fairly suppose that the ends of the hammer-beams of the

roof had some such figures on them—possibly angels very similiar to those in a church at March, in Cambridgeshire. If there were such figures at the end of the hammer-beams, they were clearly destroyed. One or two grotesque figures remain, so that it would appear only human figures were destroyed. At all events, the present ends of the lower hammer-beams, which were heraldic devices, were clearly of the 17th century, as they had the monogram "I.R." as well as the thistle and rose, which showed that they were of a date subsequent to the union of the Crowns of England and Scotland. They were evidence that some interest was taken in ornamenting the church in the reign of James I., and the monogram, "C.R." showed that the work was continued into the following reign. It would be observed that each of the heraldic devices was surmounted by a coronet, which appeared to be the semi-crown of the Prince of Wales, and there was also in one place a device resembling his plume of feathers. If so it was a matter of some curiosity what the Prince of Wales had to do with the church. The living was, he believed, in the gift of the Bishops of Ely, but came into the patronage of the Crown in the early part of the 17th century. But independently of any Royal influence, there was a way of accounting for the work done at this period. There was an incumbent of the parish, who was a very eminent man, about whom he had an account, but had unfortunately mislaid it, and could not recollect his name. He was deprived under the Commonwealth, and possibly might have held the living during these two reigns. He was a man of considerable private fortune, and was the donor of the communion plate, the date of which was, he believed, 1639 and 1641. It was said in the account that he had referred to that this man would in all probability have been a bishop, only that he died in 1659. It was easily conceivable that out of his private fortune he spent money upon the church. Proceeding with his paper, Canon Grant said he did not find any date given by the architect to the south porch, except that it was later than the nave. It was very like the corresponding porch of Bildeston Church, and was still more like the north porch of Preston Church. It was now under restoration as a memorial to the late rector (Professor Henslow), his family and friends having taken the chief part in raising the subscriptions. The history of the church from the Commonwealth to a recent date was that of the majority of the churches of the country. Neglect, and worse than neglect, and alterations, supposed to be improvements. The church was seated with carved oak seats of the 15th century, the carving of which was very good. Most of those seats were mutilated for the purpose of being converted into pews, the carved poppy-heads being sawn through to let in the deal sides of the pews. At the restoration these seats had to be removed for a time, being unfit in their then state for use. They were all preserved under the idea that some day there might be the means of restoring them. It was found necessary also at the restoration, to remove the lower part of the rood screen, which consisted of painted panels, on which were figures bearing

the instruments of the Passion. The figures were too much defaced to be replaced, but the screen had been carefully preserved, and it was a problem not easy of solution, how it was to be made suitable for being replaced. Among other things which at the restoration had to be obliterated, were some mural paintings, which seemed to have occupied spaces between the nave arches. There was only one that could be made out, and that was in the arch exactly opposite the door. There was an appearance of colour on the plaster, and when it rained and the plaster was washed off, the colour deepened, and a friend of his, who had done something of the kind before in his own church, with very great difficulty took off the outer plaster, and discovered a painting below, which was that of a large and very fine head. Over the head had been put at first a coat of plaster, and upon it a text in black letters. They found some traces of the text, but it was impossible to make out what it was. There was extreme difficulty in taking off the outer plaster in such a way as to avoid injuring the painting below. That was the only painting they could make anything of. This head it was impossible to restore, it was so much obliterated, and he really believed it was about the only thing of any antiquity which was destroyed in the restoration of the church. Lastly, with regard to the monuments. There were some very fine stones in the chancel, from which the brasses had been removed—one very large one, over 10 feet in length. There was no trace whatever of any inscription upon it. With this exception the monuments were extremely scanty. There was a tablet just outside the chancel door to the memory of one of his predecessors. There was also a monument to Sir George Waldegrave, and the only other monument was one in the chancel, to the memory of Dr. Batty, who was rector from 1645 to 1707. Dr. Batty, it was said, owed the living to a chance visit of James II., when Duke of York. The Duke was at Alderton, near Bawdsey, and being very thirsty was recommended to call and see Dr. Batty, the then Vicar of the parish. He did so, and partook of some of the Doctor's choice cider, which pleased him so much that he promised to use his influence at Court to procure the rev. gentleman's advancement. Afterwards, when he became King, he remembered his promise, and the living becoming vacant, presented it to Dr. Batty.

The party then drove to Bildeston, where luncheon was partaken of at the King's Head Inn. They thereafter adjourned to the church to listen to an address from the Rector upon its history.

The Rev. JAMES BECK, after a few introductory remarks, said the church, as standing at the close of the 14th century, was probably a small Decorated one, consisting of a nave and chancel, with a tower of somewhat later erection. The nave and chancel becoming dilapidated were pulled down, and the present church restored upon the old site. On the western wall might still be seen the position of the old roof. The aisles were added and clerestory windows put in. The roof, he believed, was one of the loftiest in Suffolk. This was no doubt done at