

GENERAL MEETING.—LEISTON ABBEY, THEBERTON,
DUNWICH, WESTLETON.

Members of the Institute and their friends, numbering about seventy, left Ipswich, on Monday, June 23, 1890, on an excursion to Leiston Abbey and Dunwich, proceeding by train to Saxmundham, and thence by road.

LEISTON ABBEY.

The first halt was made at the ruined Abbey of Leiston, kindly thrown open by Mrs. Wilson, the tenant of Lord Huntingfield. Here the members assembled in what was once the cloister.

Mr. W. H. St. John Hope, M.A., Assistant Secretary of the Society of Antiquaries of London, said this Abbey in which the Suffolk Institute of Archæology were, he believed, for the first time assembled, belonged, as the county histories told them, to the Premonstratensian Order, which took its long name from a place called Premontre, in the diocese of Laon, in the North of France. The Order was founded in 1120, by St. Norbert, Archbishop of Magdeburg, who adopted a stricter rule than the Order with which he had been associated, and changed the habit of his canons from the black of the Augustian Order to white, so that in English documents we found them called "White Canons." The White Canons were introduced into England about 23 years after the foundation of the Order at Premontre, and their first house was established in Lincolnshire. In France it was a very popular Order, but in England it did not make very much headway, and at the dissolution of the monasteries there were about thirty-six Houses of this Order scattered up and down. One of these was in Suffolk, and on this very spot. Leiston Abbey was founded in 1183 by Ranulph de Glanville, and but little was known of its history. County histories stated that it was removed from a former site about 1363. What that statement was based upon he did not know. The only chartulary of the Abbey, which was to be found in the Cotton Manuscripts in the British Museum, contains a draft of a letter in Norman French with no date; it did not appear to whom it was addressed, and it made some petition about the moving of the Abbey, but he could not learn anything definite. The only other bit of history they got was, that shortly before 1389, the Abbey was destroyed by fire. He could show them some traces of destruction by fire which might belong to that period, or to the time of the suppression, when many things were destroyed. The buildings were arranged round a central rectangular enclosure known as the cloister. On the north, was the church, which was a fairly big one for the house. On the east side were the chapter house, offices, etc., and upstairs was the dormitory, or dorter as it was, for the sake of brevity, called. On the south side was the *refectorium*, called, for the same reason, the frater. This word was a corruption of the French *réfectoire*, the "re" was dropped, and the remainder Anglicised in pronunciation. The word occurred in Chaucer, who spelt it "freytour." On the west

side was a range of buildings under charge of the cellarer, and called the *cellarium*. The lower part consisted of cellars, and the room upstairs was originally used for the housing of guests, but a little later the abbot appeared to have taken up his quarters there. That he had no business to have done, because he ought by the rule of his Order to have slept in the common dorter with the canons. But after the monastic system had passed its height in the twelfth-century, luxuries and irregularities crept in, and got worse and worse, down to the time of the suppression. The canons actually lived in the cloister, which was surrounded by covered alleys. Their day was by no means taken up in idleness. They had to perform services continually, and when it was remembered how much time was necessarily taken up in eating, drinking, and sleeping, they were not left with very much leisure to themselves. In addition to that it was part of their rule that they should spend a portion of the day in manual labour of some sort.

Mr. Hope, whose thorough conversance with the subject in hand secured him the undivided attention of the party, next proceeded to explain the various openings and doorways in the cloister, commencing with a small doorway in the north-east corner leading into the church. He explained each portion with great minuteness, opening up to those who, under his guidance, inspected each nook and corner, the whole course and system of monastic life. He then passed out of the cloister round the front of the house, which abuts upon it, to the ruins of the church, which now form the walls of barns, stables, and pigstyes. The total length of this once very fine church was 168 feet, or over 40 feet greater than that of S. Mary-le-Tower, Ipswich. The nave is entirely destroyed, and only the choir and transepts remain. The north transept window and north choir aisle window are in good preservation; the former is 45 feet high and admirably proportioned. Mr. Hope called attention to strong evidence afforded by the capitals of the arch of the crossing of their dating from the 12th and not the 14th century. These, he contended, were proof that the abbey had not been moved here from an earlier site, for the capitals certainly were not removed from an earlier building, because that was not in accordance with the universal custom that was followed. He observed that the aisles were dedicated to St. Michael and the Blessed Virgin respectively. There was a central tower, and he was not sure that this was not the beginning of a more ambitious scheme, which was never carried out. He pointed out the remains of the window tracery in the north aisle (which now forms a large barn) as being particularly well designed. He passed by the chapter house, the site of the farmery, and the *calefactorium* (or warming room) and finally called attention to the remains of an octagonal brick tower, erected probably shortly before the suppression of the monastery; the use or meaning of this had not hitherto been ascertained. Mr. Hope, however, conclusively showed to be simply one of a pair of little towers that flanked a late Perpendicular porch to the entrance of the cloister. He observed that the aspect of the ruins had not materially changed since a drawing of them in 1728.