

The Hon. Secretary was requested to write to the Rectors of Ufford and Melton, and to Mr. Chas. Smith, to express the cordial thanks of all who on this occasion had greatly enjoyed the visit to Melton and had been recipients of their kindly welcome.

## MELTON OLD GAOL.

Many ancient edifices have been converted to uses other than those for which their founders originally intended them to be put. Abbey buildings, the early homes of monks and nuns, are now occupied as farmsteads; old church walls now form storehouses; roadside chapels are occupied as stalls for cattle; inns, halls, and *hospicia* have been turned to various uses, for gaols and workhouses; and old gaols, as that of the Liberty of St. Etheldreda, have become maltings or granaries. These erections, however, retain in their walls traces of the original purposes for which they were set up. In the Abbey farmsteads may be seen architectural ruins which mark their old religious character. The cattle stalls are lighted by openings distinctly the remains of church windows, and within the walls are recesses marking the positions of the Holy water stoup and piscina.

The massive structure of Melton Old Gaol, with its walls more than a yard thick, its narrow window-apertures, together with other prominent features, at once shew to us that the building was not first built as a malting. The thin narrow bricks of its walls were probably made under the guidance of the Flemings, who settled in East Suffolk as brick-makers, introducing into the district the manufacture of red bricks, about the middle of the 15th Century.

The present building does not appear to be of a date earlier than that above-mentioned ; it may have been erected upon the site of an older gaol, for we know from existing record that the bailiff of the Liberty of St. Etheldreda held his gaol in Melton in the 13th Century and earlier. From letters patent we read that Fulk Baynard and Richard de Belhus were commissioned to deliver Melton Gaol, i.e., hold an examination of its prisoners, in March, 1296. There are no traces to shew that any of the walls now standing formed part of the 13th Century gaol ; a keen observer may, however, detect some relics of this early prison within the present walls.

The old village stocks constituted the prison of the tything ; the Hundred required a building in which to confine breakers of its law ; and a Liberty, which in this instance comprised the jurisdiction of five and a half Hundreds, was compelled to be supplied with a strong house wherein to place malefactors. In early times a manor of any great extent would have its gaol, even if it were a private dwelling. The number of private prisons led to abuse of the law of the liberty of person, so a statute was passed under Henry IV., 1404, that none was to be imprisoned except in a common gaol.

When the spirit of reformation took away from ecclesiastical authorities control of the jurisdiction over parochial congregations, and lessened their influence over the moral rectitude of the people, the State was compelled to erect numerous workhouses ; one appeared in almost every parish. Edward VI. gave the Bridewell Palace, once the residence of King John, to the city for a workhouse. Hence the term Bridewell for the part of the gaol to which unfortunate women and men of loose morals were committed.

But the government and control of these places were poor substitutes for summary justice administered by the ecclesiastical courts. Thus we find William Ashe, Keeper of the Gaol at Bury St. Edmunds, 1645, was ordered by the justices to support the base child of one Jane Wiseman, begotten in the gaol, and born at Hitcham after she was suffered by Wiseman to escape.

To Gaol and Bridewell were added, subsequently, a House of Correction. Bury Gaol, which occupied the limited precincts of Moyse's Hall, had its room for condemned prisoners and malefactors, as well as its workhouse, on the ground floor, and its Bridewell upon the second floor. We can realise the dreadful commotion there must have been at this gaol in 1689, when it was besieged by a mob eager to drag out the Scotch soldiers who had mutinied on behalf of James II. The only defender of the gaol was the gaoler, himself, who, in firing his gun, shattered his own hand.

The gaoler did not always reside within the gaol precincts, for John Holt, the custodian of the King's gaol at Bury St. Edmunds, in 1535 was allowed to dwell in a house in Hatter Street, free of rent for blowing a certain horn at Porteman Mote, according to custom. It was necessary for the underpaid gaoler to find other means whereby to increase his small stipend. He extorted money from his prisoners, or received rewards by conniving at their escape. Sometimes he was in league with a thief-catcher, sharing with him the proceeds arising from sums of money received from the justices for the apprehension of prisoners who had broken out of gaol, at the gaoler's instigation. The justices could not summarily dismiss the gaoler for incompetency. In 1642 William Turrill, late Keeper of the Gaol and House of Correction at

Blythburgh, was ordered to deliver up the houses to Humphrey Hearne, and all prisoners in the same, except those for debt, for whom Turrill was to have a room or chamber in the said gaol for their safe keeping for the period of one month. Turrill was also permitted to have the crop of vegetables then growing in the gaol garden. The conditions of a gaoler's life as above-mentioned, will give some idea of the life led by William Allen; a married man, keeper of Melton Gaol, who in the time of the Commonwealth received an annual wage of £16 for his services. The existence, as related, of Prison, Bridewell, and House of Correction under one roof will account for the curious partitions of the building, which may now be seen. The presence of a 19th Century fire-grate in the most easterly room is to be accounted for by the following fact. The Dean and Chapter of Ely, to whom the Liberty of St. Etheldreda belonged, held the gaol as a prison till about the year 1760. An entry in the parish register gives the burial of "Robert Broodbank, of Cratfield, a prisoner from the gaol, 23rd August, 1755." A bailiff of the Liberty received all post fines and perquisites, and passed his accounts at the Exchequer in the same manner as the sheriff of the county; but the profits not answering the expenses no one would accept the office of bailiff. The sheriff took charge of the Liberty, and the gaol was turned into a private house. The eastern portion was divided off into two cottages until the building was turned to its present use. The Ecclesiastical Commissioners became absolute owners of the property 8th Oct., 1869, and sold it to the late tenant, 13th Dec., 1888. Before 1869 it was the property of the Dean and Chapter of Ely.

It may here be stated that the last executions which took place in Melton Gaol yard occurred when two smugglers were hanged within it, because a rescue

was feared if they had been led out to the usual place for execution, 1747.

The records from which the history of the gaol and its unfortunate inmates may be drawn are scattered, and for the greater part are, indeed, inaccessible. A few notices of various prisoners who have occupied the cells, and of their "crimes," cannot but add a little interest to this brief paper. That women were among the number of prisoners may be seen not only from the entries of names of such persons in the parish register, but also from a schedule of irons and goods in the gaol of Bury St. Edmunds, 29th April, 1708. The list commences with "Widowes arms and bolts, three neck-collars, and thirty-two bassils."

Foxe, in his Acts and Monuments states that under the direction of Francis Noone, of Martlesham Hall, Gooch, a native of Ufford, but residing in Woodbridge, with Alice Driver, of Grundisburgh, was confined in Melton Gaol before being burnt on Rushmere Heath, on account of their faith, in 1558. That Master Noone was reduced to a state of penury because of his persecution of Protestants is one of those statements made by Foxe without foundation in point of fact, for the Noone family held Martlesham Hall in a state of affluence as late as the year 1641.

Among other prisoners incarcerated in Melton Gaol for religion's sake was Thomazine Stott, who refused in 1645 to go to church confessing she was an Anabaptist, and had lately been re-baptised. For this she was ordered to gaol, unless she conformed or abjured the realm as required by Statute 35 Elizabeth.

Later, in 1658, under the Independents, members of the Society of Friends were made prisoners

for conscience' sake ; and a petition was forwarded by this Society "that thos in Authority may see what is done in the nation and what work is committed by Evell men Against the servants of the Lord to the Ruen of maney family if not speedly prevented." Four Friends were confined in Ipswich prison, two at Bury St. Edmunds, and one, George Sheareing, for tythes at Melton, 5th Oct., 1658. "William Alexander was confined at Ipswich for going to ye steeplehouse, Arnall Nunn and William Turmot for tythes, George Whitehead for speaking to a priest, Anne Blakeley for bidding a priest prove his doctrine." These were the views of the Friends themselves. Now let us hear what the Independent then considered a just cause for imprisoning Friends. I have taken the following extract from the Church Book of the Independent Congregation, Bury St. Edmunds.

"Upon the 13th day of the ninth month, 1656, John Roote a member of the Church was admonished by the same and reprov'd for his neglecting the assemblies of the Church and assembling with the Quakers and for his owning of their wicked opinions, whereof he made himself guilty by affirming that if there were any true light it is among them and particularly for justifying and owning the doctrine of perfection and a state attainable and attained by some in this life ; and for denying the hope of the resurrection and the coming of the Lord Jesus : vidz., the hope of perfection at that day : And also for not giving thanks at meat, but sitting down to eat bread and not calling upon the name of the Lord *which crime* was proffered to be proved against him, but he confessing and also justifying the same the Church did not call for any further proof thereof.

1st, 11th month, 1656, John Roote admonished a second time.

29th, 11th month, 1656, John Roote was delivered over unto Satan for despising the Church's admonition."

How many would now escape such judgment and find themselves free from imprisonment if the like government prevailed.

We are not surprised then to find the clergy of the Established Church among the number of prisoners in Melton Gaol. Thomas Dart, rector of Kettleburgh, found quarters there in 1643, and at the same time William Fenn, clerk, was confined in Blythburgh gaol.

Melton Gaol was used for prisoners of war. After the battle of Sole Bay, many Dutch sailors were crowded within its walls. The parish register records, in 1665, the burial of "two Hollanders from ye gaol," and in 1666, "Four Dutch prisoners died in the gaol and were buried in the gaol-yard, dying of the plague about ye same time."

The places of burial for prisoners who died in gaol or were executed for their crimes were various.. A few extracts from the parish register will suffice to shew this fact :—

- 1569. The 5th day of July was put to execution three prisoners at Wilford in Bromeswell, John Laye, Nicholas Grawith, and John Evered, and were buried the same day (i.e., were not left hanging in chains).
- 1575. 14th Jan. Two prisoners put to execution and buried in the churchyard of Melton.
- 1636. 27th April. Margaret Peck executed and buried at Wilford.

The next entries speak for themselves, and tell us of the horrible death those prisoners suffered who, to pre-

serve their goods and chattels to the use of their wives and children, refused to plead guilty or not guilty at their day of trial.

1575. 20th April. William Edmundes, prisoner, was prest to death in the gravel-pit and there buried.

1620. 19th June. James Blowers, prisoner, was pressed in the gaol-yard and buried in the churchyard.

The fare of the prisoners who could not pay for food to be brought in to them from their friends consisted of shere-bread, i.e., bread provided by the Shire or County. Straw was provided for their beds. The Minutes of the County Quarter Sessions commencing 1639, shew that for the period 1639-1651, an average of £5 a quarter was spent for shere-bread and straw for the prisoners at Melton.

An early entry in the said Minutes Book states :

1639. 20 Jan. "Joseph Alexander of Bury St. Edmunds, baker, appointed to deliver weekly bread and straw unto the poor prisoners remaining in His Majesty's Gaol for the Liberty of Bury for sheare-bread and lodginge (i.e., straw), £30. Constables to raise rates so that £10 a year more be paid for the prisoners in the said gaol daily increase."

1640. 16 June. William Allen, keeper of the House of Correction, Melton, £5 to purchase stock "to set the poor people in the said house on work."

1642. Guildable and Liberty of St. Etheldreda. Margaret Gildersleeve having received the law in the House of Correction, Melton, to be returned to her master, Thomas Jury, cordwainer.

It is pleasing to find that before the days of the philanthropist Howard, and the Quakeress Fry, there were charitable and devout persons who sought to alleviate the hard lot of prisoners confined in Suffolk gaols.

In 1488 Margaret Oldham, of Bury St. Edmunds, left money that the prisoners in the gaol might have mass every Sunday, giving holy water and bread. To the prisoners in the long ward of the gaol were to be given every week seven faggots of wood from Hallowmass to Easter yearly. In 1496 Robert Hervey left to the same prisoners for four years a hundred of wood and straw.

About the year 1600 a bequest was left by Sir Rich. Fulmerston of Thetford to be bestowed among the prisoners in Melton Gaol, for William Dyer signed a deed, 2nd Jan., 1601, to this effect :—

“ A memorandum that Laurence Okeley, of San-croft, Co. Suffolk, the assignee and deputy of Bassing-borne Gawdy, of West Harlying, Co. Norfolk, esq., hath distributed and bestowed among the poor prisoners within the common gaol of Melton, Co. Suffolk, in bread, meat, and drink, at two several times in the year the sum of 3s. 4d. yearly of good English money yearly payable out of a certain close called Rooses Close, under the will of Sir Richard Fulmerston, Knt., decease.”

All who are interested in this old and unique building, for it is the only one of its kind within the county, should take particular notice of the upper rooms with their carved 15th Century cornices, the procession of ships carved upon one of the broad oak panels of the south wall, and the narrow stairway leading to these same upper rooms, with the doorway adjacent to the stairway.

V. B. REDSTONE.