

Text transcribed by Stephen Barriff from a copy of the Westbourne Park Chapel Monthly Record provided by Colin Cartwright.

Bible Circle Society.

VISIT TO THE HOME OF JOHN HAMPDEN THE PATRIOT

[4th August 1902]

When we awoke and looked eagerly to ascertain the state of the weather on the morning of Bank Holiday, our hopes of a fine day were well-nigh crushed, the sky seemed to have nothing for us but rain. Nevertheless a large number of courageous spirits turned up at Baker Street Station, and leaving the region of rain and smoke, were, within a very brief space, completely reassured as to what the clerk of the weather had in store for us. The Doctor's innate and quenchless optimism was re-echoed by Mrs. Clifford, who reminded us that

“Rain before 7, meant fine before 11;”

and sure enough, by the time we had reached Chorley Wood Station the rain had ceased. and "King Sol" had asserted his determination to rule. The country looked delightfully fresh: on either side undulating pastures, smiling meadows, rich orchards. and wooded hill-sides met our view; and when we reached Great Missenden the rain " had vanished and left not a wrack behind." Our party numbered 86, and we at once commenced our three mile tramp along the country road in the direction of Hampden ville. Entering "the glade," a superb avenue of trees, about a mile in length, which tradition states was cut through the wood in a single night to humour a suggestion of "Queen Bess," we came suddenly in view of the historic house. The fine perspective of the view directly in front, the delightful green of the beeches and pines on either side, the occasional exquisite peeps at the distant country with the ridge of the Chilterns to the right and the valley below, left nothing in the charm of an English county landscape to be desired.

Leaving the avenue, we arrived at our halting place for the day, a field to the left in which a large marquee had been erected. Our first business, after a brief rest, was to visit the Church at the end of the field. Here Mr. Stroud gave us a brief historic sketch of Hampden's connection with the church, and Mr. Chapman gave us his opinion as to the architecture. We were then rewarded for our intellectual effort with a very substantial lunch, and we must say here, that despite the obvious difficulties with which they had to contend the caterers did their work well. The view from the tent where we were seated was superb ; on the other side of the valley to the left was a wooded slope, with here and there a field of yellow and golden with ripening grain; whilst in front of us like a carpet, was a fine stretch of "England's green velvet.”

In the afternoon we paid a visit to the House, once the home of the Patriot. The Earl of Buckinghamshire himself (a real live earl) very courteously showed us round; pointed out the different items of interest, and then left us to be edified as to their significance and value by the Doctor. The Earl showed his confidence in the party by leaving some of his most treasured manuscripts in the Library and in other historic rooms. Amongst the most interesting things were several portraits by Van Dyck, Lawrence, and others; and carvings by Grinling Gibbons. There are portraits of Hampden, Cromwell, the Princess Mary and Elizabeth, and Henrietta Maria. Among the historic relics may be mentioned the chalice from which Hampden received the sacrament before his death; a rare copy of a speech made by him in parliament in January. 1641, concerning the accusations of high treason preferred against him; a mask of Oliver Cromwell; and the old family records dating back to 1043. After leaving the house we went across to the Church where the Rector, the Rev. A. Marshall very kindly gave us a brief history of the Church and its contents, thus amplifying the knowledge we had already gained. On the south wall there is a long slab of Purbeck marble covered with an inscription composed by Hampden in memory of his first wife:

“The staie and comfort of her neighbours,
The love and glory of a well ordered family,
The delight and happiness of tender parents -
But a crown of blessings to a husband.”

Hampden, however, married again within a year. The rector stated the fact, but left unsolved the moot question whether a widower pays the higher compliment to his deceased wife by marrying or not marrying again.

The social section of the party, including Mr. Griffiths, and conducted by our genial and kind friend, Mr. Redding (the owner of Honor End Farm, and senior deacon at the local Baptist chapel), then stuck rigidly to the programme by taking a special walk across the hills, and were rewarded with an excellent view and a late tea. We were favoured at tea with the company of the rector and his curate, the Rev. J. Hill, and also Mr. Redding. A hearty vote of thanks was accorded to the rector and Mr. Redding, for their kindness to the party, to which they both responded warmly. Mr Griffiths informed the company that the object of the Bible Circle Society was not to organise trips but to study the Bible; the annual picnic was only an illustration by the way, and he urged all those who appreciated the picnic, and were not members of the Society to avail themselves of its more permanent benefits by attending the circles on Sunday mornings.

Not the least pleasant part of a thoroughly enjoyable day was the walk to the station across the fields and through Honor End Farm, where a monument to the memory of the patriot records the fact of his refusal to pay the ship money assessed on him for the adjoining lands; the date of which singularly enough is 4th August, 1635, our visit thus occurring on the 267th anniversary of his valiant refusal.

S. H England