



Wiltshire Notes and Queries,

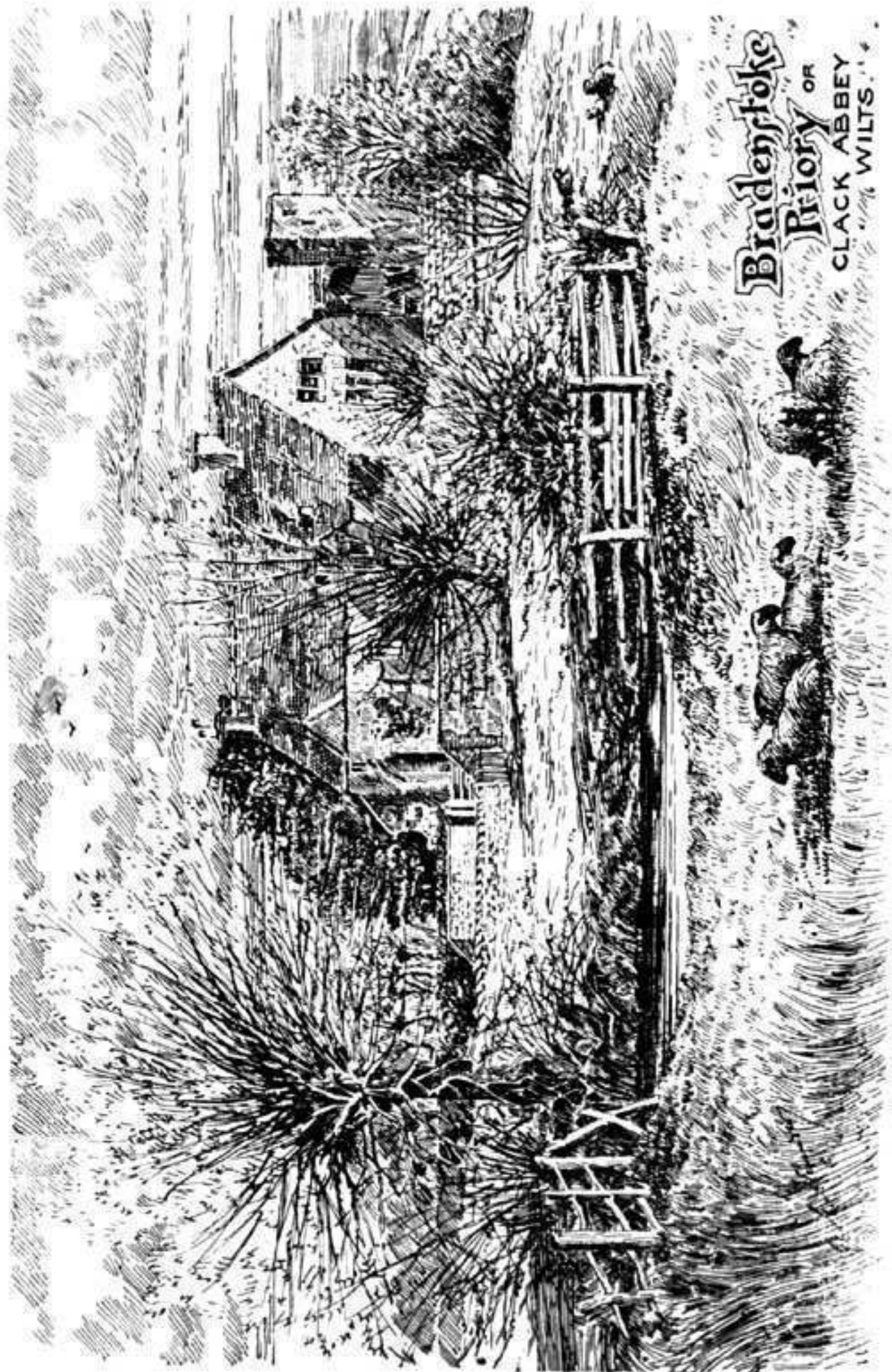
MARCH, 1902.

BRADENSTOKE PRIORY.

THE sites of Abbeys and Priories are as a rule found either by the side of a running stream or in some beautifully secluded spot; but here is a Priory set on a hill, Bradenstoke Hill, to the right of Dauntsey Station, on the main line of the Great Western Railway, from whence, entering the wicket gate to the right of the "Peterborough Arms" and climbing the steep ascent by way of the old cart track, the Priory may be gained in some twenty minutes. And a right glorious situation it is. The view from the hill alone, much enhanced of course from the attic windows of the modernized refectory, is of great extent and beauty, particularly northward, whilst the south-east embraces the celebrated hill of St. Ann's, "Tan Hill," where annually a great fair for business and pleasure is held on August 6th.

Bradenstoke hill is one of the highest oolitic ranges of North Wilts, and within a stone's throw of the Priory is the fortified position of Clack Hill.

A deep fosse cuts off a headland between two valleys; on this headland there is a square earthwork with high banks and a deep ditch, enclosing a beacon mound in the centre. Camden refers to Bradenstoke as being that place, without doubt, to



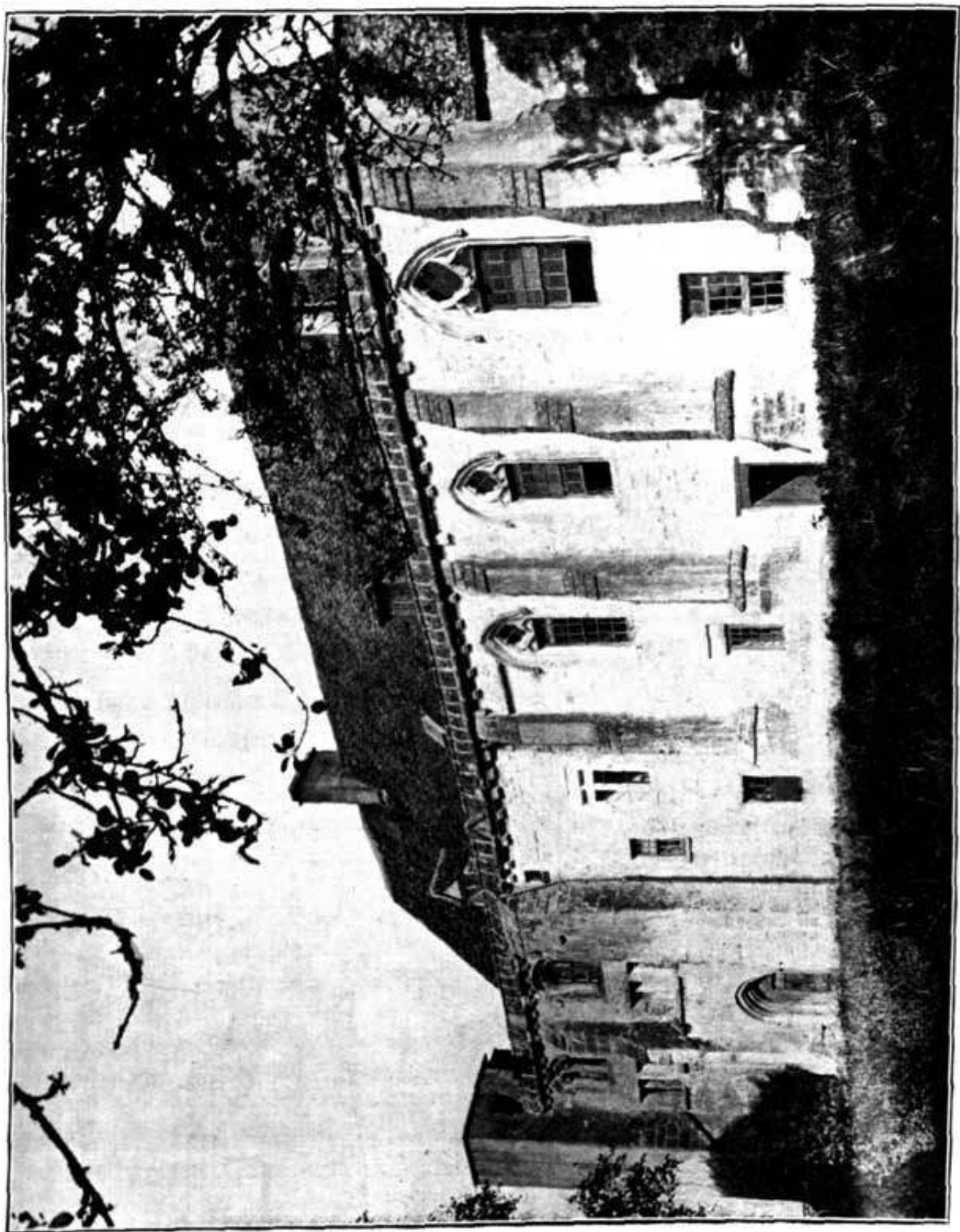
Bradenstoke
Priory OR
CLACK ABBEY
WILTS.

which Ethelwold carried his devastations in the year 905. At which time (Camden quotes Brompton here) he put to military execution all Brithendune (that is all in Braden Forest) as far as Bradestok, or, as Higden more rightly calls it, Bradenstoke. Here, then, Walter d'Evreux, father of Patrick, Earl of Salisbury, and great grandfather of Ela, William Longspée's wife, founded, in 1142, a Priory for Augustinian or Black Canons.

It was one of a cluster of four religious houses which stood on or near the banks of the lower or western Avon, the other three being Malmesbury (Benedictine), Stanley (Cistercian), and Lacock (Augustinian). Its name has been variously written as Broadstoke, Bradenstock, or Bradenstoke, whilst popularly it is known as Clack Abbey. As indicated by the poet, William Lisle Bowles, Canon of Salisbury (died 1850), we find the remains on the edge of that long sweep of hills which formed the south-western bounds of the ancient forest of Braden, from whence the Danes descended like a storm to lay waste the country about Chippenham and Lacock.

The Priory remains are confined to the Refectory range on the north side of the cloister court or garth, with the Prior's house at the east end, and the domestic offices to the west. A vaulted undercroft with octagonal piers supports the whole, and this undercroft is an admirable example of early Decorated work, of about A.D. 1320. It served as the cellar, or depository for provisions.

The Refectory Hall is lighted with what were three beautiful two-light windows, the dividing shafts being unhappily gone. These are of curvilinear tracery, set between bold buttresses. At the west end of the refectory are the usual three doors opening into the kitchen, wine cellar, and buttery respectively. At the other end of the hall are the Prior's chambers, with corner staircase and garderobe turret, out of the parapet of which sprang a so-called "holy thorn," until—to the great annoyance of the late Sir Gabriel Goldney, Bart.—it was plucked by a vandal hand. This "scion of the Glastonbury thorn" is to be seen in Buck's view of the Priory.



BRADENSTOKE PRIORY.

Availing myself of the ready and unfailing courtesy of the present esteemed bailiff (Mr. Schemelt), I was shown over the interior, and from north and south, as the landscape lay, was charmed with the views from the windows of the various apartments which, unhappily from an antiquarian point of view, cut up this fine dining hall. In the ceiling of the principal apartment there is a beautifully picked-out boss, bearing the initial "S" on a shield, indicating W. Snow, the last Prior, who, in the 34th year of King Henry VIII, became the first Dean of Bristol. According to Willis (*Cathedrals*, ii, 760) the deanery was then valued at £100 per annum. Ascending to the garrets above, you may study the very finely carved oaken roof, with the ball-flower, so indicative of the Decorated period. Sir Gabriel judiciously introduced sets of iron ties to bind the northern and southern walls together, and they may thus last for many years yet.

On the walls of the larger division in the gable may be seen the names or initials of visitors *galore*, and sketches—chiefly of womankind. My guide much amused me when he stated that he always asked those ladies whom he deemed unattached "to write their names and addresses, as then perhaps he could send them enquiring swains with a view to matrimony.

Many stone coffins and ancient interments have been unearthed on the site of the cemetery, and I was shown a stone coffin that had been disclosed on following up the drain attached to the establishment. The late Sir Gabriel Goldney was very fond of the place, and his conservatism is apparent in the insertion, in the stable, of old stones and windows reputed to have belonged to the church, which stood south of the cloister garth, and of which not a trace above the foundations remains. His further care for the village of Clack—formerly a hamlet to Lyneham—is to be remarked in the founding of a new church of neat design; and now, since the establishment of a post and telegraph office, "Clack" is abandoned, and the ancient Priory gives its name of Braden-

stoke to the village, thus, Bradenstoke-cum-Clack, which may God prosper and defend. Close to the house is a plain 15th century barn, covered with a modern gable roof. I remember reading in one of your former numbers that Canon Jackson considers the name of "Clack" to obtain from the noise of a mill there.

Certainly, as children, our memories may bear the delights of a cuff on the ear, and to beware of our tongues going like a miller's clack. But Clack Mill was pulled down by Mr. Goddard Smith, of Tockenham, who held the farm under a lease from the descendants of the Earl of Abingdon, for which he was threatened with legal proceedings. By the way, one of Aubrey's ancestors, the Danvers, held West Tockenham for many generations, of the Abbey of Broadstoke (Bradenstoke), where one of them was Prior. These Danvers, according to Camden, inherited Dauntsey from the Easterlings or Stradlings. Henry Danvers was dignified by the favour of James I of England, with the title and honour of Baron Danvers, of Dantesêy (*sic*), and by King Charles I with that of Earl of Danby. He it was who built the Physick-garden in the University of Oxford, and among other acts of charity, he founded here an Almshouse and Free-school. According to Dugdale, the annual value of the Priory was £212 19s. 3d. And it was granted, at the Dissolution, to Richard Pexhall, afterwards belonging to the Danvers and Methuens. In Corsham Court we may see a large carved stone chimney-piece of a late style of Perpendicular, which formerly belonged to the Priory.

On the ridge of the hill to the left the tourist may descry a pillar which commemorates Maud Heath, of Langley, who made the causeway which leads from St. Paul's Church, Chippenham ($4\frac{1}{2}$ miles) to the top of this (Bremhillwick) hill. The pillar is crowned with a rude statue of Maud Heath herself. The couplet on the stone at the Chippenham end is—

"Hither extendeth Maud Heath's gift,
For where I stand is Chippenham clift."

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