

## Aylesbury Gaol, Bucks.

*A History of Aylesbury*, by Robert Gibbs, published in 1885, has been recently loaned to D. by Thomas Field, of Old Bank House, Aylesbury. The chapter devoted to the Gaol, House of Correction, County Hall, etc. gives the history of places well-known to Isaac Penington, Thomas Ellwood, and other early Friends.

The author says, "The gaol was not originally erected for the purposes for which it was used. It was ever ill-adapted, insecure, unhealthy and altogether unfit for congregating a mass of human beings together, the new Gaol, erected in 1845, ought to have had an existence even centuries before. Its site was a narrow slip of ground, approached by a low gateway. At the rear of this entrance were two sets of gates, fitted in open ironwork; they were some yards apart, the turnkey's lodge intervening. The plague, the spotted fever, the gaol fever, the putrid fever, the pestilence, and other fatal diseases, with which the town used to be visited, were commonly shown to have originated in the prison.

"Outbreaks were of frequent occurrence; notices like the following are frequently to be met with in old newspapers:

"September, 1680. Broke out of Aylesbury Gaol, on Friday morning last, being the 1 of this instant, two prisoners, one . . . with a full dark coloured Cloth Coat . . . the other . . . in a close bodied Cloth Coat with striped facings to it. . . Whoever can give notice of any one or both of them to Captain Richardson, keeper of Newgate, or to Mr. Nathaniel Birch, keeper of Aylesbury Gaol, shall be rewarded for their pains.'"

Birch was the gaoler who had frequent charge of Ellwood and Penington. The former tells us in his *History* that Birch "had not long before behaved himself very wickedly, with great rudeness and cruelty to some friends of the lower side of the county," and of the gaoler's wife he writes, "She was a cunning woman, and treated us with great appearance of courtesy, offering us the choice of her rooms . . . but we were too wary to be drawn in by the fair words of a woman, and told her we would have a free prison." Probably, at the time of the above outbreak some Friends were in prison; John Wyatt, of Long Crendon, was committed in 1678, and died there after three years' confinement.