



Berkshire Antiquities.

THE INAUGURAL ADDRESS OF THE PRESIDENT OF
THE BERKS ARCHÆOLOGICAL SOCIETY,
C. E. KEYSER, Esq., M.A., F.S.A.

I HAVE been told by our Honorary Secretary that one of the first duties which will devolve on me as your new President is the necessity of delivering an inaugural address, in order that I may endeavour, so to speak, at once, to prove myself worthy to occupy the honourable position to which you have just elected me. I must confess that I approach my task with much diffidence, as I am conscious that my knowledge as an archæologist is not of a very high or general order, and that I am more competent to point out small details with regard to discoveries of interest, more especially in our old churches, than to embark on any dissertation in the comprehensive science of archæology, and the wide field which is included within the legitimate labours of such a society as ours. The business of our society is, of course, to endeavour to elucidate the history of our Royal County of Berkshire, by the remains of former days still existing in our midst, and the various records which are accessible, and which give us an insight into the past. It is also our duty to try and create a greater interest in the various relics of earlier times, and, especially, to get those who are the owners of property, or the custodians of our churches to appreciate the value of the monuments of antiquity temporarily entrusted to their care. It is indeed sad to see, even in these more enlightened times, the damage and destruction which is still going on. It has often struck me that a society such as ours could exercise a most salutary influence in these matters, by acquiring a reputation for giving sound and reasonable advice in cases, where, as for instance, in the restoration of an old church, ancient features might be swept away to render the edifice more convenient for our present services. In the majority of instances, much might be saved without detriment to our ritual, if only a competent and unprejudiced committee could acquire a reputation as an authority to be consulted on these questions. I am sure that one result would be a very considerable

saving of money to those responsible for the work, and the preservation of many objects of interest, which architects are only too often ready to condemn. I would particularly impress on the members of our committee, who are, I hope, fairly representative of all parts of the county, the necessity of vigilance in these matters, and where it may appear that mischief or destruction is likely to ensue to make a report, so that the combined influence of our society may be brought forward to endeavour to stay the hand of the destroyer. I have, myself, during my residence in the County, seen instances where unnecessary renovation has been going on, and it is hardly necessary for me to enlarge on the indifference and want of sentiment which so generally still prevails in this utilitarian age. And now, with regard to the antiquities of our County, I will only touch lightly on the relics of those earlier residents of whom we have no history or records. Implements of stone and iron have from time to time been dug up, as proof of their occupation, though fewer objects have been found in Berkshire than in many other parts of England, and I have not heard of any discoveries of these traces of the earliest inhabitants as having been recently made. Of a later period we have remains, though they are of less importance than could have been anticipated. Although there must have been many Roman roads traversing the County, yet comparatively few traces of Roman occupation have been found, though it is possible that the examination of the site of a supposed Roman settlement at Tilehurst may lead to some important results. The only Roman towns known to have been in existence in Berkshire are Spinæ at Speen near Newbury, and Bibracte, supposed to coincide with Bray, near Maidenhead, where was a ford over the Thames, but there seems to be little doubt that there was also a settlement at Wallingford, though its name has not been handed down to us. As you are all aware, a systematic scheme of excavation has been going on now for several years, at the great Roman city of Calleva at Silchester, and though this is just out of our County, yet we ought to feel a special interest in its results, as our County Museum at Reading has been selected as the depository of the various objects found during the progress of the work. A larger insula is to be explored this year, entailing more expenditure than has been incurred in previous years, and as the whole work is being carried out under the personal surveillance of some of our most distinguished antiquaries, I can most confidently recommend this work to your most generous support. The main object of the excavations at Silchester has been

to give us an insight into the domestic and civil life of the people under the Roman rule, and as Calleva never was a Roman fortress, and the site has not, as in the majority of the more important cities, been occupied by a later settlement, it affords us a grand opportunity of acquiring this knowledge. Of the other early remains, we have the interesting group of antiquities on the chalk downs above Uffington, where the White Horse, the fine encampment known as Uffington Castle, commanding one of the finest views in England, Weyland Smith's Cave, and the Ridge Way can easily be inspected in an afternoon. There are also early camps at Blewbury Hill, Finchampstead, and Sinodun Hill, and elsewhere, besides the old ramparts at Wallingford, but no investigation as to their origin and the people who occupied them has been made in recent years. A very large number of early tumuli also remain on the Lambourne Downs. It seems to me that with regard to these early remains much may be added to the very limited knowledge which we now possess about them. Coming down to later times, we find some early examples of domestic architecture in the county. Both at Sutton Courtenay and Appleford are remains of houses of the Norman period, and some portions of Windsor Castle are also of early date. Only a small portion of the gatehouse of Donnington Castle has been spared, while of Wallingford Castle only a fragment of wall has been preserved, and of those formerly existing at Reading, Newbury, Faringdon and Brightwell the sites even are, I believe, unknown. Various remains of old houses are to be found in many of the villages, though they mainly date after the year 1600. The noble mansions at Englefield and Shaw are no doubt well known to the members of our society. As regards the ecclesiastical buildings in the county, we have not, perhaps, as many fine churches as are to be found in Oxfordshire and elsewhere. The absence of good material in the county no doubt exercised an influence in the building of the churches, and the expense of importing the stone would have been too great to enable the former residents to erect such noble edifices as we find in Northamptonshire and other counties, where fine building stone could be quarried in or close to the parishes where the church was being built. We know that after the Norman conquest, and when the country had settled down again, a great impetus was given to church building and within a few years most of the churches mentioned in the Domesday survey were rebuilt in a more durable style. In some parts of England, owing to the anxiety to enlarge and improve the

churches, few of these old Norman buildings remain, but in Berkshire a very considerable number still exist, and we find at Lambourne, and many of the smaller churches such as Avington, Padworth, &c., very excellent examples of the Norman style of architecture. I propose to write a paper on the Norman doorways in the county, and to read it at a subsequent meeting of our society, if this will be acceptable to the members. Of the pre-Norman or Saxon style only four examples have come under my notice in the county, though there are doubtless portions of very early structures incorporated with later work in other buildings. At Wickham, near Kintbury, is a Saxon tower, with the baluster shafts to the belfry windows peculiar to that style, and at Aston Tirrold in the north aisle is a triangular headed doorway only recently opened out. At Cholsey there is some long and short work to the tower, and at Upton a very early window. Both of these seem to be relics of Saxon work. Of later date the most perfect example of the early English or first pointed period remains at Uffington, which is known to have been erected by the Abbots of Abingdon, and probably early in the 13th century. The chancel at Cholsey has very nice work, and at west Shefford is a small but good example of the same period, while at Englefield the arches between the nave and aisle, and the window at the east end of the aisle furnish us with very rich and ornate specimens of the earliest period of this style. Of the decorated period there are many good examples. The Collegiate Church at Shottesbrooke, and the Church of the Greyfriars at Reading are the most complete, and good work of this style also remains at Warfield and Sparsholt. Of the perpendicular period the most perfect example is the Collegiate Chapel of St. George's, Windsor, and good specimens of the style remain at St. Helen's, Abingdon, Childrey, and Yattendon, the last named church being entirely of late 15th century date. It will be sufficient for me to-day to mention generally that in many of the churches are fine monuments and brasses, and that much interesting old glass, and many wall paintings have survived to our time. These and other details have to a certain extent been described, but there is, I think, an opening for additional papers, which would be of interest, and bring into greater prominence some of the more uncommon features in our country churches. I would suggest the advisability of having careful notes made of all these movable and removable objects, as they are only too apt to disappear. Old glass is often taken out to make room for new, and I have noted instances where it is being preserved

at the parsonages, probably to be lost sight of and forgotten by the rising generation. With regard to mural paintings, many are found and almost at once destroyed, others are carefully preserved by one incumbent, only to be erased or whitewashed over by his successor, so that it is wise that some record should be made of them, and an illustration obtained while the opportunity remains. When I undertook the work of editing for the Council of Education, South Kensington Museum, the list of buildings having mural and other painted decorations, I made a point of visiting almost all the existing examples, and many were the fruitless journeys undertaken in my desire to inspect pictures which had been obliterated. The earliest example of a St. Christopher in England was found in this county, and destroyed because it was thought to be grotesque, though regret is now expressed by the Vicar, to whom I explained the lesson which the legendary morality was intended to teach, that the painting has been effaced. As this subject is still one of my special hobbies, I shall be grateful for information which will enable me to visit churches as soon as discoveries of this kind are made.

In conclusion, it is hardly necessary for me to remind you that by far the most magnificent ecclesiastical structures in the county were the Churches of the great mitred abbeys of Reading and Abingdon. Of the latter not a stone remains above ground, but we know that it was equal in its dimensions to many of the existing Cathedrals, and its beauty was no doubt commensurate with its grand proportions. There are still considerable remains of the Abbey buildings existing, mixed up with other poor structures erected on the site. The gateway is a fine example of perpendicular work. There is also a very interesting two storeyed building with elegant fireplace and windows of the best decorated period, supposed to have been the hospitium, and a long low structure also of two storeys considered to have been the infirmary. This block of buildings is very interesting, though it is not so well known as it should be. Of the great and royal Abbey of Reading, the scanty remains are of course well known to all of you who are here to-day. One cannot but regret that there were not at Reading as there were at St. Albans, Malmesbury, and Tewkesbury, townsmen of sufficient taste and public spirit to combine to preserve the magnificent church for the benefit of the town for all future generations. It must have been not only grand in its proportions, but elegant in its architectural details, and what remains, chiefly only the core of the old walls, makes us grieve for the opportunity lost once and for ever of

preserving the stately structure. The Norman doorway from the cloister to the church, and forming the entrance to the Chapter-house, must have exceeded in size those of any existing examples in England, and from portions of mouldings, etc., still preserved about the Abbey precincts, these doorways must have been noble examples of the Norman style, and fitting accessories to an edifice so directly owing its foundation to Royal influences. I dare not deal to-day with other objects of antiquarian study, such as coins, parish registers, etc., but all these should in their turn occupy our attention. It is satisfactory to feel that Miss Thoyts has undertaken to go into the last-named subject, and under her competent management we may hope that many interesting facts in our county history will be recovered and brought to light.

ANGLO-SAXON SPEAR-HEAD.—A few days ago, while some men were excavating near the railway station at Maidenhead, they came upon an ancient iron spear-head about 13 inches in length, socketted, but the socket was broken by the workmen. They brought it to me, and I now have it in my possession. It is doubtless Anglo-Saxon.—HENRY ARROWSMITH.

HURLEY.—On September 26th, 1898, I acquired several very ancient bone trophies lately rescued from the bed of the Thames, viz., a large piece of a stag's antler, much larger than that of a fallow deer; a small piece of the base of another antler, with a piece of the skull bone attached; and a section of the skull of some bovine animal in good condition and with both horns, of course minus the shells, which are in a very fair state of preservation. They were found this month and last month by a dredging party, close to Medmenham Abbey, about forty feet from the Hurley (Berkshire) bank and about four feet below the surface of the river's bed.

“St. Mary's, Hurley, in the Middle Ages; based on Hurley Charters and Deeds, by the Rev. F. T. Wethered.” The Vicar of Hurley is an enthusiastic antiquary, and has for many years been collecting information concerning the history of the parish he knows so well. He has now published a volume on the subject which is replete with interest, and is a worthy addition to the list of Berkshire books. The author writes learnedly on the history of his church, the Priory of Hurley, Hurley Seals, the Priors and Vicars of Hurley, and published a large collections of Hurley Charters and Deeds which were placed at his disposal by the Dean and Chapter of Westminster. We regret that want of space prevents a more extended notice of this interesting book.