



Berks Archæological Society.

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REPORT, 1899-1900.
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IT is with much satisfaction that in making their Report for the year 1899-1900 the Committee have to state that the Society is in a satisfactory condition, and also to record a period of useful work in the department of historical research and architectural study which the Society was founded to promote.

There are indications which show that the work of the Society is appreciated by a larger number of Berkshire inhabitants than at any time during its long history. The increase in the number of members, the large attendance at most of the meetings and excursions, the kindly welcome of the Society at the residences of the County families of Berkshire, and the general appreciation of lectures and publications on antiquarian subjects, all show that greater interest is being taken in the study of history and archæology.

PRACTICAL WORK OF THE SOCIETY.

The year has been marked by considerable activity in the arrangement of lectures and excursions, and the Committee desire to express their thanks to the gentlemen who have read papers before the Society, and to those who have entertained the members on the occasion of their visits to historic places. Five meetings were held in Reading when lectures were delivered, and during the summer months four excursions were arranged, which were largely attended by the members and friends of the Society.

LECTURES AND EXCURSIONS.

1.—On May 3rd, 1899, the Annual Meeting of the Society was held at the Abbey Gate, when the officers of the Society were elected, the Report read, and other business transacted. The President then delivered a valuable and interesting lecture on "Norman Doorways in Berkshire Churches." The lecture was illustrated by a fine collection of large photographs, and thirty-two of the most interesting doorways were exhibited by a magic lantern,

which showed with much accuracy the architectural details. The lecture was repeated in the evening for the benefit of those who were unable to attend in the afternoon, and the thanks of the Society were heartily given to the President for his most valuable contribution to the history of the architecture of Berkshire. A resumé of the lecture together with many illustrations appears in the April number of the Berks, Bucks and Oxon Archæological Journal.

2.—On May 31st, the first summer Excursion took place when the Society visited Hurst, Binfield, Billingbear and Wokingham. Hurst House was first visited by the kind invitation of Mr. and Mrs. Mackey. Hurst Church was described by the Secretary and Binfield Church by Canon Savory. The High Sheriff of the County, C. T. D. Crews, Esq., F.S.A., kindly welcomed the party at Billingbear and hospitably entertained them, and gave an account of the history of the house, the ancestral home of the Nevills, exhibiting many objects of great interest, coats of armour, valuable pictures and choice furniture of ancient date. The President proposed a very hearty vote of thanks to the High Sheriff for his great kindness in receiving the party, and for the hospitality he had accorded to them. The Church of All Saints', Wokingham, was also visited, and described by Canon Sturges.

3.—On June 21st an Excursion to Oxford was arranged, but on account of the Encænias it was necessarily postponed until July 12th. Considerable trouble had been taken by the officers to organise this excursion, and a luncheon arranged by the hon. Secretary in his old college hall of Oriel, but as the members did not apply for tickets in due time, the excursion had to be abandoned. The Committee hope that in future the members will apply early for tickets, and so save the officers much unnecessary labour and disappointment.

4.—On July 26th an Excursion was made to Salisbury, Old Sarum, Amesbury and Stonehenge, in conjunction with the Reading Literary and Scientific Society. Old Sarum was described by the Secretary, Amesbury Church and Stonehenge by the President, and the Cathedral by the Sub-Dean.

5.—On September 27th the Society visited Wantage, Harwell, East and West Hendred, Ardington, and by the kind invitation of Lord and Lady Wantage, Lockinge House. The Churches in the country villages in the neighbourhood of Wantage possess many features of peculiar interest to archæologists, and the Society was fortunate in having them described by the President. At East Hendred the members were welcomed by Mr. and Mrs. Eyston,

and invited to the Manor House, when a valuable paper was read by Mr. Eyston on the history of the five manors. A public meeting was held in the Town Hall under the presidency of Lord Wantage, when a lecture on the history of Wantage was given by the Secretary. Lord and Lady Wantage very kindly entertained the Society at Lockinge House, and were heartily thanked for their hospitality.

6.—On November 18th a demonstration was given at the Reading Museum by the Rev. Alan Cheales, Hon. Curator of the Historical Department, on the Egyptian and Etruscan pottery recently added to the Museum collections.

7.—On February 21st, 1900, an interesting lecture was given by the Rev. Alan Cheales at the Abbey Gate on "Homer and Holy Writ."

8.—On March 28th a valuable lecture was given by Mr. W. M. Childs, lecturer at Reading College, on the history of Reading in the early years of the nineteenth century.

9.—On April 25th the President again favoured the Society by delivering a valuable lecture on "The Norman Doorways of Bucks and Oxon," illustrated by many excellent magic lantern slides and photographs.

THE USE OF THE ABBEY GATE.

During the past year a correspondence arose between the Society and the Reading Corporation with regard to the occupancy of the Abbey Gate. The Committee desire to record their thanks to the Corporation for allowing the Society to continue to hold a building which by its traditions and associations is so admirably adapted for the headquarters of the Berkshire County Archæological Society, and so convenient for the meetings of its members. The Committee agreed to sub-let two rooms for the purposes of the Central Aid Association, and also to grant them the use of the large room for meetings. The Central Aid Association were not able to carry out their part of the arrangements and the negotiations have therefore fallen through. Arrangements have been made for the inspection of the Abbey Gate, and the Librarian of the Society, the Rev. Alan Cheales, is always ready to conduct parties of visitors over the Abbey ruins and explain its most interesting features.

The Librarian has re-arranged the books of the Society with much labour and pains, and to him the Committee desire to express their thanks.

An interesting memorial of old Reading has been recently purchased and added to the collections of the Society, viz. :—two

beautifully carved doors which came from the Oracle, a house built by the Corporation with money bequeathed by John Kendrick in 1624, for providing poor clothiers with work. The Oracle has long since disappeared. The large gates have been removed to St. Mary's Hill, the residence of R. Hewett, Esq. As far as we are aware those gates and these doors are the only existing relics of a building which has a curious history, and is regarded with mixed feelings and somewhat melancholy reflections by Reading men.

By the kind action of a member of the Society, Dr. Hurry, a sum of money has been collected for the completion of the restoration of the Abbey Gate, which was commenced by Sir Gilbert Scott in 1860. The architect, on account of want of funds, left several blocks of stone and capitals uncarved. This defect Dr. Hurry has kindly remedied, and the Committee desire to express the thanks of the Society to Dr. Hurry and those who have assisted him for their action in the matter, in restoring the only habitable portion of the famous Abbey and beautifying the home of the Society, the use of which, by the generosity of the Corporation, they continue to enjoy.

CONGRESS OF ARCHÆOLOGICAL SOCIETIES.

The Berks Society continues to hold its place among the Archæological Societies of England, and the Secretary attended the annual Congress at Burlington House, on July 12th. A paper was read on "Wills, Diocesan and Parish Registers," asking the Government to take steps for their better preservation and arrangement. The formation of County parish register Societies, cataloguing of effigies, the National Portrait Catalogue, and the Victoria County Histories were also discussed.

PUBLICATIONS.

Few books connected with the County have been issued during the present year. "A Record of the Redes," of Barton Court, Berks, by Compton Read, is a valuable monograph on a distinguished Berkshire family. The transcription of marriage registers of Berkshire, by Mrs. Cope, née Miss Thoyts, is progressing, but will not be published by Messrs Phillimore and Co. The "Berks, Bucks and Oxon Archæological Journal" continues to be published, containing a record of the proceedings of the Society and other notes and papers on antiquarian subjects.

Prizes for the study of history have been awarded to the Kendrick Schools.

The Committee would be glad if some members of the Society who have leisure would undertake the very important work of

making a complete Archæological Survey of the county, which was commenced some years ago by Miss Thoyts.

The Reading Museum has been enriched by many treasures, amongst which may be mentioned the Egyptian and Etruscan collections recently presented by Lord Arthur Hill, and a Romano-British collection from Theale, purchased from Mr. Harrison. The Silchester collection is growing apace, and is fast becoming the most important exhibition of Roman antiquities in England. During the past year two insulæ have been examined, a remarkable feature of the year's work being the discovery of eighty entire vessels of pottery. Owing to want of funds the Berks Society has not been able to subscribe to the Silchester excavation Fund for some years, but the Committee hope that with improved prospects some money may be contributed to carry on a work which so largely benefits the town of Reading.

The Council of the National Trust for places of Historic Interest or Natural Beauty has approached the Society and invited its co-operation in preserving the monuments of the past. In such a work the Society cannot fail to take a keen interest. It is proposed to form a local committee to watch over the historic remains of our county, and to assist in promoting the work of the Trust.

The financial condition of the Society has been greatly improved by the exertions of the Hon. Treasurer, Mr. Ravenscroft. Owing to the lamented death of the late Treasurer, the Rev. J. M. Guilding, the finances were left in much confusion, from which Mr. Ravenscroft with much labour has successfully rescued them, and quickly restored them to a sound and satisfactory condition. The thanks of the Committee and of the Society are due to him for the pains and labour he has bestowed upon a difficult and troublesome undertaking.

In conclusion your Committee desire to express their satisfaction at the revived interest now taken in all that pertains to the history of the county, and we trust that the Berks Archæological Society is serving the useful purpose of making better known the county and land in which we live, of which we are proud, and which plays so honourable a part in English history.

(Signed,) P. H. DITCHFIELD,
Hon. Secretary

Treasurer's Report for Annual Meeting, May, 1900.

OWING to the confused condition in which the financial affairs of the Society were handed over to the Treasurer it was impossible last year to make any financial statement, but by degrees matters were unravelled and the position of the Society at that time stood approximately as follows :—

At the Bank there was a deficit of £4 5s. 5d.
 In addition to which the Society stood indebted
 in various ways to an amount of about ... £100 os. od.

The asset available to meet this deficit was an unknown quantity consisting of unpaid subscriptions.

The present position of the Society is, that with one or two exceptions, which will be hereafter indicated, the whole of the Subscriptions to the end of 1899 and a small portion of those for the present year have been collected.

The liabilities above mentioned, together with such others as during the course of the year arose (the greater part of which were current, such as gas, taxes, caretaker, expenses of meetings, &c.) have been met, with the result that after meeting all the estimated expenses to date there is a balance in hand of about 14/-, while the greater proportion of this year's subscriptions have yet to come in.

To accomplish this result it has been needful to cut down all unnecessary expense, but in addition the Treasurer has been largely assisted by help kindly rendered chiefly in two directions as follows :

1. By a return from the Corporation of £27 15s. od. paid for rates.
2. By liberal discounts allowed by creditors of the larger amounts.

The Treasurer declining to admit that the Society was in any way insolvent, made alternative proposals to those gentlemen, viz., either that they should wait until next year or at least to the autumn of the present year for paying of their accounts in full, or should allow a substantial discount from their charges and have their accounts settled at once. The thanks of the Society are due to the Trustees of the late Rev. J. M. Guilding, Messrs. Holmes & Son,

Mr. Chas. Slaughter, Mr. Targett, and Mr. R. Bradley, for meeting the case thus put before them in the latter way.

The financial position of the Society now stands as follows :—

Cash at Bank and in hand	...	...	...	£1	13	11½
Arrears of Subscriptions to 1899 not yet paid				3	2	6
Estimated amount of Subscriptions for 1900						
not yet paid	...	...	...	40	2	6
				<hr/>		
				£44		

Against this :—

Estimated current expenses for rates, gas, printing, caretaker, meetings, &c., to end of 1900	20	0	0
Bradley's Bill for annual meeting circulars (1900)	0	8	0
Shervel, for tea and annual meeting tea (1900)			
about ...	1	10	0
Stationery	5	0	0
			<hr/>
			£26

It should be added that the excursions of the Society during the past year have been managed so that they have just cleared their cost, and that by private subscription of most of the Members of the Committee two old doors from the Oracle, Reading, have been added to the property of the Society. The thanks of the Society are due to the Committee for this.

ANCIENT BEDS AND HEIRLOOMS.—In an article on "Ancient Beds and Bedding," in "The Globe," the writer says :—Our ancestors set great store by their beds, and bequeathed them as a valuable item in their personal estate by will. In 1368, William Lord Ferrere of Groby left his son "the green bed with arms on it," and his daughter "the white bed." In 1376, the Black Prince left to his Confessor, Sir Robert de Walsham, "a large bed of red camora," and to Mr. Alayne Gleyne "our bed of camora bordered with blue ergles"; while his widow bequeathed to her son, Richard II. "my new bed, of red velvet embroidered with ostrich feathers of silver, and heads of leopards of gold, with boughs and leaves issuing out of their mouths." William of Wykeham similarly disposed of his bed to Winchester College. Indeed, the custom of bequeathing beds prevailed till within a century ago; and at the present day there are many old dower houses containing an ancient four-poster as an heirloom fixture, which a clause in the lease saves from disturbance on the part of the tenant.