



## Our New County History.

*A Paper read by Harold Peake, Esq., before the Berks Archæological Society, February 26th, 1903.*

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**I**T has long been a reproach to the County of Berkshire that it has not possessed a History, at the same time complete and thoroughly trustworthy. Many attempts, it is true, have been made in this direction, some excellent monographs have appeared on special subjects, and volumes dealing with single towns or parishes, in some cases even with Hundreds have been published, but no work treating of the County as a whole can claim to be even approximately exhaustive, while many bristle with errors and inaccuracies. This deficiency is now, however, to be removed, and we are promised a History, which for size and accuracy shall equal or excel any similar production.

But if this new work is to be of the greatest possible value, if it is to be free from the defects that mar the pages of earlier volumes, it is necessary that the co-operation should be obtained of all those inhabitants of the County interested in Archæological research. No Antiquary, however great his experience, can make his work exhaustive or absolutely free from error without considerable local knowledge, and no one man can possess such intimate knowledge of a whole County. Much therefore depends upon how the services of willing workers are enlisted, much more on how these are organized, else with so great a body of helpers,—for that many will offer assistance we cannot doubt,—confusion will prevail, causing overlapping in some directions, and inevitable omissions in others.

It is well therefore that this Society, representing as it does the greater part of the expert knowledge of the County, should consider without delay what steps should be taken towards carrying out these objects, that as far as possible unity of method may prevail, fellow-workers be brought into touch with one another, and the volumes be made worthy of the Royal County.

I feel that the duty of laying suggestions before you should rest with your energetic Secretary, who is acting as County Editor for these volumes; but as he has asked me to address you on the subject, and to tell you of my experiences in organizing the work in the two Hundreds which he has asked me to undertake, I feel bound to acquiesce, although owing to my recent arrival in the County, and my lack of previous experience in such matters of organization, I should have preferred to have been a listener rather than a speaker.

Before considering the special arrangements to be made in the County, perhaps it would be well to glance for a moment at the main organization at head-quarters, for the series of Victoria Histories of the Counties of England is not confined to our shire alone, but embraces the whole Country. To carry out such a monumental work a very carefully planned organization is required, and this has been provided, and may serve as a guide for similar arrangements in County and Hundred.

The work is being produced by Messrs. Archibald Constable & Co., of 2, Whitehall Gardens, Westminster, with the assistance of an Advisory Council consisting of the Chancellors of the Universities, the Directors of the Nation's Museums, the Presidents of Learned Societies and Professors of History, and many leading Antiquaries and scientific men. The General Editor is Mr. H. Arthur Doubleday, who has as his assistant Mr. William Page, F.S.A. These gentlemen are further assisted in their work by such experts as Messrs. R. Lydekker, F.R.S., F.G.S., F.L.S., F. Haverfield, F.S.A., J. Horace Round, W. H. St. John Hope, Oswald Barron, F.S.A., and G. Laurence Gomme, F.S.A.

But the special work for our County is in the able hands of your secretary, the Rev. P. H. Ditchfield, who is acting as Editor for these volumes, and he has the assistance of two bodies of workers. Firstly the experts mentioned above, among whom are some possessed of special knowledge of the County, such as Mr. Claridge Druce, F.L.S., for Botany, and Mr. O. A. Shrubsole, F.G.S., for "early man." And secondly a large influential and representative Committee, under the chairmanship of the Lord Lieutenant, whose duty it is to assist the Editor in obtaining general information, and in particular that relating to the topographical section. Many of those present are no doubt members of this latter Committee, and it is with a view of making suggestions as to how these gentlemen can best be of assistance in this work, that I am here to-day.

But first let us consider the scope of the work, and the subjects with which it proposes to deal. Those of you who have seen the provisional prospectus will have noticed the "synopsis of contents" printed therein, but as these papers may not yet have reached all those present, perhaps I may be pardoned for giving here a short summary of the same.

Natural History is first dealt with, and the various departments of this subject have been placed in the hands of specialists, chiefly from the British Museum. These pages are, I believe, already completed, some are even in print, so that our assistance will not, I believe, be required in this direction. Early Antiquities next claim our attention, and the periods of "Early Man," "Romano-British Remains" and "Anglo-Saxon Remains" have been placed respectively in the hands of Messrs. O. A. Shrubsole, F.G.S., F. Haverfield, F.S.A., and Reginald A. Smith.

The first of these gentlemen has completed his section, but should any further antiquities come to light not dealt with in his article, they can be mentioned in the topographical section. Mr. Haverfield tells me that he would be glad to receive notes respecting any finds of Romano-British roads, villas, or implements, but whether Mr. Reginald Smith has completed his section or not, I have no information.

The elucidation of the Domesday Record is in the hands of Mr. J. Horace Round and the Rev. F. W. Ragg; Architectural remains of the Middle Ages will be edited by Mr. W. H. St. John Hope; Family History is being dealt with by Mr. Oswald Barron assisted by Mr. Horace Round; Folklore by Mr. G. Laurence Gomme; Schools and Forestry by Messrs. A. F. Leach and J. Nisbet.

It is highly probable that many of the above mentioned experts would, like Mr. Haverfield, be glad of assistance from those local ladies and gentlemen who are willing to help the work in various ways, and when the Editor's organization is complete, perhaps many of them will refer some of their difficulties to the local workers, and in return advise them when in difficulty.

But we must now turn to the section which most intimately concerns us, and for which we are all of us more or less responsible—the Topographical section; for if this is to be made complete, the assistance of all local antiquaries will be required. In this section will be given a description of the existing condition of each parish, together with a sketch of its history from the earliest times to the present day. Those features which come under the headings alluded

to before will here only be touched upon, but the manorial history will be given with as much detail as possible. Every statement, however, that is made must be vouched for by a reference to an original authority, and nothing taken on hearsay or from earlier histories without verification.

This section is the special department of our county editor, and knowing his great experience, both in antiquities in general, and in this county in particular, we may be sure that the work is in safe hands.

But no one man could accomplish such a Herculean labour unaided, unless, at least, he devoted a whole life to the task. Assistants must be forthcoming, competent, energetic and enthusiastic, or the work will be of necessity imperfectly carried out. But these assistants must be well-organized, else work will be done twice over, omissions will occur, general confusion will prevail, and an excess of cooks will spoil this historical broth.

The work must be divided and again sub-divided—there must be a definite chain of responsibility. If the editor is the commanding officer, he must have sufficient competent captains over definite areas, and these again their lieutenants, or to put it in another way: if the editor represents the County Council, there must be District and Parish Councils beneath him.

For historical investigation the modern district is by no means suitable, for as a division of the county it is comparatively speaking, of recent origin. The hundred is the more natural unit, and so it is that our editor has decided that his captains shall be Centurions—each responsible for a hundred.

But just as in local government towns above a certain size are deemed urban districts, and are exempt from the jurisdiction of the rural district council, so in this case most of the towns in the county will be dealt with by a separate captain. The decision as to whether a town be thus dealt with or included in the hundred will depend on many circumstances, and will rest with the editor.

There are twenty hundreds in Berkshire of varying size, each of which must be considered for our purpose as a separate entity. Some of these are very small, and two or more might well be combined under one "captain." As a matter of fact I have undertaken, at Mr. Ditchfield's request, to be responsible for Faircross and Kintbury-Eagle, two of the largest hundreds in the county, though I should be glad enough to resign one of these into other hands, if any one

would relieve me of the task, as the work is growing almost beyond the limits imposed by time and local knowledge.

The boroughs are only six in number, and the remaining towns are neither large nor very important, but in the larger boroughs the responsible sub-editor will probably require assistance from his friends. This should be readily obtained, for most of our towns contain many enthusiastic antiquaries who would no doubt be willing to assist. The organization in these cases is not a matter of very great importance, and each sub-editor would no doubt make his own arrangements suitable to the case.

In the country districts it is different, and here many difficulties occur. For the last three months I have been endeavouring to organize my two unwieldy areas, and it is my successes and failures in this respect that I would lay before you to-day, both as advice and warning to those about to undertake similar duties, and with the hopes of receiving many valuable hints from those present, whose experience and local knowledge is so much greater than my own.

The chief duty of the sub-editors of hundreds is, as we have seen, to compile those portions of the topographical section which relate to their hundred, and to the parishes contained therein. There is but little to say of the hundreds themselves, except to note some references to murders committed within their bounds. It will be necessary, however, to point out any changes in their dimensions, and where possible to explain why certain parishes or manors were transferred from one hundred to another. My own view of the matter is that great landlords desired their estates to be in as few hundreds as possible, and so outlying manors came to be included in the same hundred as the lordship to which they were attached. This explanation is not, however, generally accepted, but a careful enquiry should show whether or no it will account for all the changes that we meet with. The amalgamation of hundreds, as in the case of Kintbury and Eagle must also be treated of, the disappearance of others, such as Roeberg and Thatcham, and the rise of entirely new hundreds as that of Faircross.

But it is upon the parishes that the interest chiefly centres, and by a parish we are to mean the area known by that style prior to 15th August, 1838, when an act was passed "To amend and render more effectual the Church Building Acts." All parishes formed since that date will be dealt with under the head of that to which they formerly belonged.

First of all a full description of the area is required, giving par-

ticalars of its situation and physical aspect ; its soil, agriculture and products ; its roads, railways and canals ; its industries, schools, and any other similar matters which may be thought worthy of mention. This information can generally be supplied best by the parish correspondents, those lieutenants whom I have already alluded to, and of whom I shall have more to say presently. Still it would be well for the sub-editor to draw up a detailed list of the points on which information is required, that there may be some uniformity in the replies received. A paper of questions, on this line, has been drawn up by the General Editor, which will be found useful for this purpose.

Then a short account is required of all the antiquities that exist or have been discovered in the parish, and here again the correspondents could give valuable assistance ; but it will be well for the sub-editor to search through Lyson's and other topographical works, as well as through the proceedings of local societies, where many of such things are mentioned and described. A full account of such antiquities will appear in the sections written by the various experts who are dealing with the different periods, but in the topographical section mention should be made of all items of interest.

In collecting this material full use should be made, if possible, of the correspondents, who, we will presume, know every field in their parish ; for there are still a few barrows and earth-works as yet undescribed, no mention of which is to be found in the works above referred to, or on the Ordnance maps. It is only a few weeks ago that word was brought to me of an earth-work or camp in a wood near Great Shefford, which seems hitherto to have escaped detection. I have not yet had an opportunity of making a personal inspection of this feature, but from the accounts received it appears to be one of no small importance.

Lists of such antiquities, describing the exact spot at which they stand or have been found, should be sent to the experts, who will write for further particulars if they require them. Field names, such as *Street*, *Rideway*, *Totterdown*, *Cold harbour*, and others should be noted, as possible signs of the existence of Roman roads or British camps, for though the presence of these names is not always certain evidence of the existence of such remains, it may serve to direct the attention of the searcher to some other piece of evidence which might else have been overlooked. But a good eye for country is the best asset in this branch of the work, an eye which will tell its possessor that the natural surface of the soil has

been interfered with, and will lead him to detect the cause, and to trace out the ancient road or earth-work.

Then comes the principal task in the topography, namely tracing out the history of the parish and manor from the earliest date at which written records exist until the present day. This is no light undertaking, for every published record, likely to contain any information must be searched, and the scattered details gained must be extracted, compared and so put together, that if possible a continuous history of the parish and manor may be compiled.

I understand that before long a list of published works to be thus searched will be issued by the General Editors, and will be placed in the hands of the sub-editors. In the meantime I might mention a few that should first be examined, though further particulars can be gained from a perusal of such works as :—

Dr. Cox.—How to write the History of a Parish.

W. P. W. Phillimore.—How to write the History of a Family.

Walter Rye.—Records and Record Searching.

There is usually but little documentary evidence available prior to the Norman Conquest, but Kemble's *Codex Diplomaticus* should be consulted for charters, wills, &c. referring to the parishes or manors in question, for though many of these documents are of doubtful authenticity, most authorities are agreed that the bounds there given are usually correct, and these often throw much light on the early history and the state of the Country.

For instance the bounds of Boxford speak of a "dene pit" and a "Lindene" or valley in which flax was grown, and though all knowledge of the former has disappeared, its site can be approximately fixed, while near the latter was a field, called in the common enclosure award "the Liniards" or the Flax yards, a name now corrupted into "Leonards." The Welford bounds, besides mentioning sacred trees and wells no longer there, talk of a "green beorge" or barrow, long since disappeared, though the field known as the "borough ground" may perhaps tell us of its site. In Brimpton we hear of Beaver's isle in the Kennet, and have a reference to a military way which may help us to find the lost road between Silchester and Speen. And in each of these bounds are mentions of places and objects full of interest to those who study the ancient customs and religion of their forefathers.

It is well to warn those who have not as yet used the *Codex*, that Kemble has frequently wrongly identified places, and his index is full of errors, but with a good knowledge of the neighbourhood

it should not be difficult to ascertain what parish or tything is referred to.

Many of the Charters relating to Berkshire are to be found in the Chronicle of the Abbey of Abingdon, which contains besides a mass of very interesting and instructive material.

For instance, a few years after the Conquest some unscrupulous persons deprived this Abbey of its lands at Leckhampstead, and declined to give them up when requested to do so. The Abbot was naturally wrath, and set out with candle, bell and book to excommunicate and curse all those, whether men or women, who had had a hand in this nefarious transaction.

"And so" continued the chronical,—mark these words *and so*.

"And so the King, while hunting met his end, &c.," and a description follows of the death of Rufus.

But, interesting though it be, we cannot linger long over the disputes and fulminations of the great Abbot, for we have to trace the manorial history of our parishes from the conquest to the present day. The Domesday record is of course the usual place to begin, and though we have two experts dealing with this remarkable volume, each sub-editor must begin his researches from this point. The black book and the red book of the exchequer, the Testa de Nevill and the Hundred Rolls, will furnish plenty of further information, but many gaps in the continuity will yet remain, some, I fear, never to be filled up, though much can be found in the pipe rolls and early Norman Charters.

But it will be tedious to enumerate all the books that must be searched,—the inquisitio post mortem, the close rolls and the feet of fines,—it will here be sufficient to say that the publications known as the "Rolls series," the Pipe Rolls Society's volumes, and those published by the Harleian Society, cover the greater part of the ground, though some few volumes exist that have been published in other ways.

The history of the families who owned the manors should be worked out, and much of the necessary information required for this can be gained from the books already mentioned. When difficulties occur they might be referred to Mr. Horace Round, who has made this subject his own, but the searcher, if he be new to the task, will be surprised how few families there are which he will come across. Until the reign of Edward I. it would seem that nearly all the land in England was in the hands of a few dozen families, and in whatever County the Antiquary may be working, the same names will



meet him at every turn. I have gained, already, much assistance for the present work from pedigrees that I worked out years ago in Shropshire and Northamptonshire, and have met with but few landowners who were not, as it were, old friends; for Society,—I use the word with a capital S,—under the Norman and early Angevin Kings was a small and select coterie, and *mesalliances* were uncommon.

Besides family history it is well to look at all points bearing on the social history of times. References to the “Black Death” are not uncommon, and I find four holdings in Westbrook lying waste on account of the depredations of this dire disease.

Mills, too, are interesting, and throw light on the economic history of the parish, and I have been able by means of a survey of Edward VI.’s time, to identify the site of one, long forgotten, known as Gosseling’s mill, which existed, according to the Abingdon Chronicle, in Henry II.’s reign, and which in the time of Henry VI. belonged to a clothier of Newbury, who used it as a “fulling mill.”

The number of volumes with which the sub-editors have to deal may, perhaps, be somewhat disconcerting to those who have not done similar work before; and many may wonder how they are to obtain access to these works. Of course there is the British Museum Library, but it is not always convenient for those living in the country to spend many hours there, and a great many hours are needed to accomplish the work. But there are two other methods open to workers. The Reading Library contains a good collection of the necessary volumes,—though I am not sure whether the series is complete,—besides possessing a very fine collection of works relating to the County. I believe that under certain conditions these works are allowed out, but those living near here could no doubt consult them in the room set apart for that purpose.

But to others there is but one institution that I know of which supplies this want, and that is the London Library in St. James’ Square. Here is a collection, practically complete, of all the volumes required; and a member subscribing £3 os. od. per annum is entitled to have out 15 volumes at a time. The new catalogue has just appeared, which shows that it is by far the finest circulating library in the world, and one which is indispensable to any one engaged in research of any kind.

But one great difficulty meets the sub-editor at the beginning of his task. Entries are not made under the heading of the parish, but of the manor, and these are by no means always the same either

in name or extent. It is therefore important at the outset to compile a list, as complete as may be, of all the names of manors and other areas comprised in the parishes in question. This is by no means an easy task, and I know of no royal road to its completion. I have, however, one suggestion to make which will help the attainment of this end. Let the sub-editor first make a table of the parishes in the hundred, then with the aid of the correspondents compile as complete a list as he can of the tythings or townships, hamlets, farms and manor houses, in each parish, and of such manors as are still known by any specific name.

Tithe maps, and better still common enclosure awards where they exist, often give much of this information, but sometimes it is difficult to find. Small parishes often contain only one tything, but in large parishes, where there are sometimes four or five tythings, or even more, it is very important to know the names of these, their situation, and if possible their bounds. In some cases this is easy. In Boxford Parish the tything bounds are given in the Common enclosure award. The same is the case in Chaddleworth. Some of these bounds can be thus obtained in Welford Parish, though the division between Welford and Easton is not shown. Kintbury has no award, or if there is one its whereabouts are not known, but an old map dealing with the tithe, before the commutation act, gives the bounds of three tythings, but as yet we can find nothing about those south of the river Kennet. In Speen the common enclosure awards and tithe map have both disappeared, and the only available evidence appears to be traditional.

Nevertheless no pains should be spared which may result in gaining this information, for the tything was always in theory, and generally in practice the same as the manor.

When even these precautions have been taken, there will still remain references to manors which have no modern counterpart, and the identification of these is one of the most difficult, though most interesting of the duties of the sub-editor. Field names here will sometimes help, and references to disputes with neighbouring manors or parishes. By means of such a dispute in the time of Edward III., about fishing in a certain mill-stream, together with the name of a wood, I was once enabled to identify a Shropshire manor that had defied the great Eyton himself; and the exact situation of another in the same neighbourhood, which Eyton had been unable to identify, though he rightly suspected its whereabouts, I gathered from the chance remarks of an aged rustic, who as a boy had remembered a well which was called by the name in question.

If direct evidence fails, we must have recourse to circumstantial ; remembering, however, that we must keep hypothesis distinct from fact, and when dealing with theories only, write of them as such.

Thus can the history of the manor be in most cases traced from Norman times to the present day, but if any gaps remain, when all these sources of information have been searched, recourse must be had to the unpublished documents at the Record Office. The General Editors have, I believe, engaged the services of a competent searcher for this purpose, and these cases must be referred to him, or to the County editor, who will, no doubt, communicate with the authorities in London.

The more recent history of manors can usually be obtained from papers in the possession of the present owners, and the information on this head given in Lyson's, is always full, and generally fairly accurate, though of course it needs verification.

In tracing the history of the manor the searcher will usually find all he requires relating to Ecclesiastical matters and the history of Monastic establishments, but if not he will have to make a special search to complete his account. I can give no general advice on this subject, beyond recommending the use of Dugdale's *Monasticon* ; but if any one is in doubt he had better state his case and ask the advice of our County Editor, or send in a query to the *Berkshire Quarterly Journal*. Ecton's *Thesaurus* and the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* should also be consulted, and such works as Money's "*Church Goods of Berkshire*."

Church buildings, fittings, plate, bells, monuments and documents will require description, but this duty will, for the most part, I believe, be left to special experts, though no doubt the co-operation of local assistants will be welcomed.

The sub-editors of hundreds are most, if not all them, experienced antiquaries, and know as well or better than I do how to set about their work. With the parish correspondents, however, this may not always be the case. But these latter have a very important series of duties to perform, and on the manner in which they carry them out to a great extent depends the success of the venture.

I would advise them first to call upon the incumbent of the parish, the Chairman of the Parish Council, the Churchwardens and Overseers, the Lord or Lords of the Manor or their agents, and to ascertain what documents are in existence bearing on the history of the parish, where they are deposited, what date or dates they bear.

Those most usually found are Tithe maps and Common enclosure

awards, Parish Registers, Churchwardens and Overseers account books, Rolls of Courts leet or Courts Baron. The searcher is fortunate who finds all of these existing in a complete condition, but there are few, if any, parishes where some may not be found.

When examining the common enclosure awards it will be well to study the common field system which has been so ably treated of by Mr. Seeböhm, and perhaps the documents may throw fresh light on some of the many points of this interesting question which are still in dispute. Parish registers often contain notices of important events which have happened in the Parish, such as the removal of the Altar rails at Boxford during the Civil Wars, and the wounding of a leading inhabitant of Chaddleworth in Hangmanstone Lane during the same disturbed period. Churchwardens' books also contain many interesting entries, and are sometimes of great antiquity ; those of Brightwalton going back to the fifteenth century.

Next let the correspondent from these sources of information, and from any others available, compile a list of the tythings or townships, hamlets, farms, manors, &c., existing in the parish, besides noting down the most interesting field names that he has come across ; then let him send a copy of these lists to the hundred sub-editor.

Next let him ascertain from the ordnance or other maps, from the lips of old inhabitants, or from the proceedings of local societies, what early antiquities exist or have been found within his area. Let him compile first three lists, containing respectively Pre-Roman, Roman and Saxon remains, and then deal with later antiquities on somewhat similar lines, such as Manorial, Ecclesiastical, Military, Industrial, &c.

Then let him endeavour to trace back the history of the manor or manors from the present owner as far back as local information will enable him to do so, and compile a short account of the recent history of Churches, Chapels, Schools, Railways, Canals, &c., and give a short description of the physical condition of the Parish, its acreage, soil, crops and industries. These points cover practically all the regular work that will be expected of him.

But besides this the sub-editor will be glad, no doubt, if the correspondent will act as his agent in endeavouring to elucidate some difficult points in the history of the Parish. For instance, some of those who are acting in this capacity in the hundreds under my charge are endeavouring to trace out the bounds mentioned in some Saxon Charters.

The Bounds of Boxford, Brightwalton and Leckhampstead have

nearly all been identified, thus giving much information respecting the roads in use at that time, and the sacred trees and stones, the relics of former religions. The bounds of Chieveley seem to point out that Peasemore was once in that tything, and so explains the allusion in the Abingdon Chronicle to the founding of the Church at the latter place, when the people of Peasemore had become distasteful to the inhabitants of the other village.

Search may often be made for indications of the existence of some manor whose whereabouts is as yet unknown, and its presence may often be identified by the means of field or farm names mentioned in the local records.

I do not know how much folk-lore is to be included in this history, but the expert, Mr. Gomme, would, no doubt, be glad of information on this head, gleaned from the lips of "the oldest inhabitant," or from the stories told to children. Many strange tales will thus be learnt, pointing to ancient superstitions. Of the Hangmanstone, in the corner of Boxford Parish, the legend is still told of the sheepstealer who sat thereon, with his booty hung around his neck, when the struggles of the sheep caused him to fall backwards and be hanged. Nor is the interest in this story lessened by the fact that it is told of at least sixteen other Hangmanstones in England and Wales.

At Leckhampstead there stood some years ago a circle of large Sarsen stones, with an avenue of the same leading to it. The late Dr. Silas Palmer, who saw and described the monument, conjectured that it was the remains of some Druidic temple. Be this as it may, an old lady living near assured me that the stones were placed there by the Romans, and that the Roman Catholics were wont to walk around the circle on festal days.

I have already spoken of sacred wells, stones and trees, but two of the latter in Boxford Parish are worth mentioning more fully. One, the Clerk's elm, stands in the middle of the village and is of considerable antiquity, though, to judge by its roots, it is but the successor, or *stem stick* as the local people have it, of one or more predecessors. May not this be the village tree, where the tything moot was held, though tradition has it that it was planted by a former parish clerk? Our other famous tree, the Court oak, no longer exists, though a farm-house still bears the name. It stood, it is supposed, above the present house on Rowbury Hill, and it is at least a plausible conjecture that under its branches was held the moot of the Hundred of Roeberg.

These points, however, are somewhat speculative, nevertheless all such information is calculated to throw much light on the past history of the County, and even if there is not sufficient space to make use of all this material in the present volumes, our County Editor will no doubt be able to arrange that interesting and valuable matter shall be saved from oblivion.

It cannot, however be expected that every village will produce a full-fledged antiquary, and that each correspondent will have all the necessary experience. But every one interested in the past history of his locality can be of assistance, and every archæologist must some-day make a beginning. All that is necessary in the correspondents is a certain intelligence and education, a knowledge of the neighbourhood, and above all energy and enthusiasm. All the rest will soon come.

But it should be the business of the sub-editor to see that the necessary knowledge *does* come, that the correspondents do not waste time and energy in working upon wrong lines, and that they understand the true meaning of the words and subjects involved in the tasks set to them. It is surprising what *lacunæ* may be found in the knowledge of even well educated people, even on every day topics, and it will be well for the sub-editor to realise that matters which are so familiar to him that he seems to have learnt them in the nursery, may nevertheless be quite unheard of by some of his correspondents. So much, too, of the work involved in this enquiry will be so novel to them, that he must be careful not to ask for too much at a time, or the beginner will feel disheartened and throw up the task. A little sympathetic advice will soon remove the most obvious deficiencies, and in a few months he will have at his back a staff, if not of experts, at least of intelligent workers.

But the sub-editor may well retort that in addition to other duties he cannot undertake the task of school-master by correspondence. He will, however, find that it will pay him, in the long run, to do so; but as many will ask the same questions, and be in need of the same information, I would suggest the following plan which we have tried in our hundreds with no little success.

Let a MS. magazine be issued, every month or two months, by means of which the sub-editor may address his staff, and give them the needed information. Let him arrange for articles, also, by other competent writers among his staff. Let the magazine contain, also, specimen returns from those correspondents who have made the greatest progress, to act as a guide to others, and let it be a kind

of Notes and Queries, to keep the fellow workers in touch with one another. This magazine should be circulated from one member to another, and by this means the beginners will have the advantage of obtaining the combined advice of those of greater experience, and the sub-editor will obtain many items of information, which he might have looked for in vain by other means.

The information required for these volumes may seem to some but a dry list of manors and their owners, and the work of compiling and arranging such material may appear to be but a dull task. But I would ask such as are of this opinion to remember that these details, dry though they may appear to them, are a very necessary preliminary to other and more interesting aspects of historical study.

Until we have identified all the manors and traced their successive lords, we are not in a position to make a more detailed study of the social life of our villages. But with this necessary background, we can often restore, with considerable amplitude, the picture of our neighbourhood and its inhabitants, from the present day, step by step back to the Norman Conquest. Nor need we stop here; for though documentary evidence will now fail us, by means of antiquities, ancient traditions and superstitions, we may realise the outline, at least, of much earlier and more primitive times.

We shall see our people, rough and uncivilized it is true, first as a community of free men, then a subject race to alien invaders, till gradually the lord of the manor arises over the free village community, he in his turn becomes subject to a greater baron, and at last by the end of the middle ages, the servile condition of the people reaches its maximum. With Tudor times begins their emancipation, and so on through Civil Wars, the Revolution and the Chartist riots, by means of Franchise Acts and Local Government Bills, we see them gradually recovering the lost ground, and continuing the vista into the future, we may look forward to the time when they may again, in reality, become the free community from which they started.

Or we may trace the development of their religious beliefs, the progress of their industrial arts, or the changes that have taken place in their dwellings, food or clothes. All of these have an interest for the student of human nature as well as for the Antiquary, and it is the pleasing duty of the latter so to arrange such historical material as exists, that the former may draw a true picture of times long gone by, to guide him in his attempt to picture the future for which he is striving.

But I have already spoken at too great a length, and on matters which must necessarily be dull to all those who may not be specially interested in the production of our County History. The views that I have put forward are suggestions merely, the results of my experience during a few months' work at this undertaking ; but I hope that in the discussion which will follow, we shall hear the views of those, who from long experience and local knowledge are better fitted to advise the Society on this matter.

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## Fifield in Benson, Oxon.

*By J. E. Field, M.A., Vicar of Benson.*

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The Manor of Fifield in the Parish of Bensington or Benson retained the privileges of a separate hamlet until recent years, when they were relinquished by the late owner, Mr. Robert Aldworth Newton, and it has since been rated as an integral part of the Parish. But it is no part of the Hundred known in Domesday as the Hundred of Bensington and in later times as the Hundred of Ewelme. Fifield forms one of the isolated portions of the Hundred of Dorchester, though separated by a distance of three miles from the nearest limit of that Hundred. This is significant ; for it seems to indicate that the hamlet belonged to the bishopric of Dorchester. When the King of Wessex, Cynegils, in 635, gave Dorchester to St. Berin the Bishop for his Episcopal See (as Bede tells us), it is probable that he bestowed at the same time the lands which we find to be in possession of the bishopric at a later date and which became the Hundred of Dorchester. Fifield is part of those lands ; and since Bensington was a royal vill to which the King came from time to time with his court, we may infer that it was thought desirable that at such times the Bishop also should have a house in the town.

The name undoubtedly implies *Five Hides* ; and taking the hide to be something under 100 acres this agrees with the extent of the Manor. In a document of 1588, presently to be noticed, it is called "Fyfehyde, otherwise Fyshide, otherwise Fyfeilde." Similarly Fyfield in Essex "is otherwise written in records Fifhide, Fyfhide, Fishide, Fyshide, which name is plainly derived from Fif, five, and hyde, a quantity of land in the Saxons' way of reckoning" (Morant's *History of Essex*, 1768, I. 133), and in a document of 9 Edward II.