



Berks Archæological Society.

REPORT, 1993—4.

YOUR Committee have much pleasure in being able to report that the Berks Archæological Society has enjoyed a prosperous and active season, and continues to carry on its important work for the encouragement of the study and preservation of the antiquities of the Royal County. In an age when the destruction of ancient buildings and old landmarks is somewhat ruthlessly rampant it is well that there should be in each county an Association, whose main object is to educate the popular mind and to teach men reverence for antiquity, and to preserve for future generation, as far as its influence can extend, those objects of historic interest which have been bequeathed to us by our ancestors. As an instance of the useful effects of the working of your Society we may mention the ancient and historic monument called the Blowing Stone, popularly known as King Alfred's Bugle Horn, a Celtic and prehistoric monument of great interest. It was reported to your Secretary that the lock which guards the secrets of the orifice was broken, and that the internal organs of this famous instrument were at the mercy of any boys who might, by the aid of a few stones, stay its mysterious notes for ever. Your Secretary wrote to the owner and agents of the property, the lock was restored, and the Blowing Stone preserved. As far as its means will allow, your Society grants votes of money for the purpose of carrying on works of Restoration, provided that they are in accordance with the true principles of Architecture, and for the excavations of the sites of old buildings, such as the admirable work now being done at Silchester by the Society of Antiquaries. With larger means at its disposal the Berks Society might accomplish much useful work in this direction, and the Committee would gladly welcome all gentlemen of the county and landowners as members of the Society, in order that by their influence the hands of the Society might be strengthened and its usefulness increased. Another

important work of the Archæological Society is that of publication. The printing of documents, the recording in permanent type the results of discoveries in genealogy, history, and archæology, is one of the chief aims of every self-respecting antiquarian body. For many years past your Society has not been able through lack of funds to contribute anything to the literature of archæology. It is hoped that with a large increase in the number of members more may be accomplished in this direction.

TENANCY OF THE ABBEY GATEWAY.

Your Society still enjoys the privilege of holding its head-quarters in the ancient Gateway of the Abbey of Reading, than which no more appropriate building could be utilised for the purpose. During the last few months the former agreement between the Corporation and the Society has been discussed, and new terms have been proposed by the former. Under the new agreement the Society will pay as rent the sum of £15 a year together with rates and taxes, and will be enabled to sub-let the room to other Societies for a fixed sum, which, it is estimated, will cover the cost of the increased rental. The officers of the Society will be prepared upon due notice to conduct visitors over the Abbey Ruins, and explain the many points of interest. It is essential, however, that adequate notice should always be given, in order that the officers of the Society may be able to arrange to attend.

PRACTICAL WORK OF THE SOCIETY.

During the past season we have been especially favoured by brilliant lectures delivered by expert and learned antiquaries, and the usual number of excursions have been held to places of historic interest. Your Committee desires to return their best thanks to the readers of papers and to those ladies who have entertained the members to tea on the occasion of their meetings or excursions.

EXCURSIONS.

On June 9th, 1903, the Society joined with the Newbury Field Club in an excursion to the Battlefields of Newbury, arranged by that Society, and admirably conducted by Mr. Walter Money, F.S.A., the historian of the town.

On July 23rd the Society visited the beautiful Abbey of Malmesbury, and by the kind invitation of the Countess of Suffolk and Berkshire, the historic mansion of Charlton. The President described the architectural features of the Abbey, which, he stated, was built about the same time as the Abbey Church of Reading, and he

pointed out that the elaborate ornamentation was very similar in type to the carved work seen in the Forbury Gardens at Reading, and in the garden of St. Lawrence's Vicarage. The Secretary gave an account of the history of the abbey and town of Malmesbury, and briefly described the house and history of Charlton Park, which was especially interesting to Berkshire people as being the home of the illustrious family who took part of their title from the Royal County. The thanks of the Society were expressed to the Countess of Suffolk and Berkshire for her kindness in allowing them to visit the house, and to Mr. Bates, her agent, for making arrangements for their reception.

On September 17th the Society visited Maidenhead, when a large meeting of the residents in the town and neighbourhood assembled in the Town Hall. Dr. Playne presided, and a lecture was given by the Hon. Secretary on the history of Maidenhead. There was an exhibition of municipal charters, documents, and maces, arranged by the Town Clerk. A large party then drove to Hurley, where they were received in the Church by the Rev. F. T. Wethered, who gave an able and interesting lecture on the history of Hurley. Lady Place was then visited, and Mr. and Mrs. Hancock kindly entertained the party to tea in the Refectory of the Priory. A visit was paid to the vaults of the old house which saw the birth of the Revolution, to the monastic pigeon-house, and tithe barns. Mr. Wethered kindly presented the members of the Society with a printed report of his lecture. The thanks of the Society are due to Dr. Playne for his help in organising the meeting at Maidenhead, to the Vicar of Hurley for his lecture, and to Mr. and Mrs. Hancock for their hospitality.

LECTURES.

On June 5th, on the occasion of the annual meeting, a very interesting lecture was delivered by the President on the history and architecture of Swalcliffe Church, Oxfordshire.

On October 21st, Miss M. A. Murray, of University College, London, gave a very able and realistic lecture on "Social and Domestic Life in Ancient Egypt, with some account of recent Excavations." Miss Murray had spent the previous winter conducting the excavations at Abydos, under the direction of Professor Flinders Petrie, and her account of the discoveries made was particularly valuable.

On November 19th, Mr. Nigel Bond lectured on the aims and work of the National Trust for the Preservation of Objects of His-

torical Interest or Natural Beauty. Amongst other objects now entrusted to the care of the National Trust he enumerated the Falkland Memorial at Newbury. It was suggested that the Berks Society should co-operate with the National Trust and assist its work by calling the attention of the latter body to objects which ought to be preserved.

On February 18th, 1904, Mr. W. C. F. Anderson lectured on "Recent Excavations in the Roman Forum," showing a thorough knowledge of the locality. The lantern slides were of great interest.

On March 24th, Captain Henderson gave a lecture on a tour in Normandy, showing by his excellent views the application of photography to architectural study.

On April 30th, Mr. St. John Hope, Secretary to the Society of Antiquaries, lectured on the Silchester Excavations to a large audience of about 130 members and their friends. The Mayor and Mayoress of Reading (Mr. and Mrs. Jackson) very kindly entertained the Society to tea in the Town Hall, and a demonstration at the Museum of the objects found at Silchester concluded one of the most successful meetings which the Society has held for several years. The thanks of the Society were given to Mr. St. John Hope for his lecture, and to the Mayor and Mayoress of Reading for their kind hospitality. As the result of a collection kindly made by Dr. Hurry on this occasion, the sum of £8 1s. 6d. was raised for the Excavation Fund. The Society will be glad to receive any further sums for this purpose, and the Committee recommend that a further sum of £5 be given out of the Society's funds.

CONGRESS OF ARCHÆOLOGICAL SOCIETIES.

The Fourteenth Congress, of which your Society is a member, was held in London on July 8th, 1903. The Secretary attended the Congress on behalf of the Society. A provisional scheme for recording earthworks was carefully drawn up and submitted for the approval of the Congress. The report of the Treasury Committee on the custody of local records was presented. It was suggested that the County Councils should be approached and urged to form in each county a Record Office for the preservation of ancient documents. Each Council should be urged to obtain returns from each parish as regards the custody of parish records. With the discussion of the inconvenience caused by the adoption of English names by aliens the session of the Congress closed.

ARCHÆOLOGICAL PUBLICATIONS.

The Victoria County History of Berks is progressing, and the first volume, it is hoped, will soon be printed. The interest, support, and practical help of all local historians is earnestly solicited. The Berks, Bucks, and Oxon Archæological Journal is still continued to be published, and the tenth volume is now in progress, containing the Society's notices, reports of meetings and lectures. The work of editing and conducting this publication entails considerable labour upon the Secretary, and it is uncertain how long he may be willing to continue to carry on the work under the present arrangement.

The transcription of Parish Registers is an important undertaking. The indices of the Parish Marriage Registers of Bradfield and Ruscombe have been published in this Journal. An inventory of Church 'Plate of the County is also in progress. The transcription of the Churchwardens' Accounts of St. Mary's Church, Thame, commencing 1442, is an important work. Papers have appeared on Fifield in Benson, a tour through Buckinghamshire, Virginia Water, Alard Rector Scholarum, Somerton Church, Children's Game, Rural Parochial Records, and Notes and Queries.

Your Society has taken some interest in the proposal to change the name of East Garston to Esgarton, and it is hoped that the praiseworthy efforts of Mr. Wethered and Mr. Tudor may be crowned with success. A paper on the subject has been printed in the Journal; copies of it have been re-printed, which it is proposed to send to the County Council when a favourable opportunity occurs.

Amongst the discoveries made during the year we may mention a remarkable specimen of a bronze spear head, dredged from the Thames, which in some respects is unique, and was perhaps the weapon of some chieftain. It is in the possession of Mr. Goolden.

The Reading Museum has been enriched by several gifts and purchases. Especially valuable additions have been made to the collection of relics of the Abbey, the Committee having been able to purchase, at a cost of five guineas, an Edward IV. penny and a half-penny, minted at Reading, each having a scallop shell on the reverse side; also at the cost of £20, a Patent, granted by the last Abbot to Thomas Cromwell and his son to the Stewards of the Abbey Manors; attached to which is a fine specimen of the Abbey Seal; it is believed there is only one other example of this in existence.

EGYPT EXPLORATION FUND.

Another large grant has been received by the Museum Authorities from this Fund, comprising sickle teeth, flint, 1st Dynasty, clay model offerings of the time of Khufu Cheops, vases from the foundation deposits in the Terrace temple of Aahmes I., Ashabti figures, 22nd Dynasty, and various Græco Roman antiquities. Translations of some inscribed hieroglyphic sculptures have been obligingly supplied by Miss Lawes, of Caversham. A fine specimen of a mammoth's tusk has also been presented.

SILCHESTER EXCAVATIONS.

The Report of the Explorations of the past year is of considerable interest, and shows moderate progress. The Secretaries state that despite the wet season, a considerable amount of ground was explored, and the discoveries of remains of buildings were decidedly above rather than below the average of recent years. The principle baths of the town were found, a matter of the highest importance, and the finds include a small altar, portions of capitals and bases, part of a large basin of Purbeck marble, and other objects of interest.

PROGRAMME FOR 1904.

A visit to Silchester will certainly be one of the excursions during the summer; on enquiry it is found that it will be more advantageous to make an excursion to the site of the Roman city later in the year, after the cutting of the corn. It is proposed to visit the interesting town of Burford, with Fairford and Witney, and later on Wallingford.

In conclusion, your Committee would urge upon the members of the Society the importance of increasing the present membership. The larger rent which the Society will now have to pay for the use of the Abbey Gate, the numerous schemes which present themselves for furthering the aims of the Society, all require funds and the increasing interest of its members. It is important also that all subscriptions should be paid early in the year and that the task of collecting them should be facilitated as much as possible. Personal offers of service in archaeological research would be very acceptable, and offers of papers to be read before the Society, would be heartily welcomed.