



Proceedings of Societies.

BERKS ARCHÆOLOGICAL SOCIETY.—EXCURSION TO SONNING, SHIPLAKE, HARPSDEN COURT AND HENLEY.—The excursion, organized by the Berks Archæological Society, to Sonning, Shiplake, Harpsden Court and Henley, on Thursday, August 5th, proved thoroughly enjoyable, the brilliant summer weather adding much to the pleasure of the party. The Hon. Secretary was abroad at the time but he had made arrangements for the excursion and contributed two papers which were read by the President. A start was made from the Abbey Gate, Reading, at one o'clock, the company driving in brakes to Sonning. At Holme Park they were met by Mr. Martin J. Sutton and Mr. Phil. Sutton. They were conducted along old Monks' Walk to a site—a simple mound of earth—of the Bishop's Palace. In Queen Elizabeth's time the whole place belonged to her and she moved the building to its present situation. King John slept at the Palace the night after signing the momentous document at Runnymede, and the next day he attended service at Sonning Church. This walk, rich in historic memories, also possesses a wealth of rural beauty. At one's feet are sweet-scented flowers, some privileged to entwine themselves among excellent specimens of Norman work—the capitals of a cloister or arcade discovered by Mr. Sutton. The old fish ponds remain.

SONNING CHURCH.

The visitors entered Sonning Church and here they were joined by Mr. Holman Hunt, who painted "The Light of the World," and his wife. Mr. Holman Hunt is over 90 years of age, but he entered heartily into the researches of the party. Mr. Keyser said that Sonning was a very ancient place and that for hundreds of years was closely identified with Salisbury. From early records they knew that one of the cathedral churches of the diocese was located there and that 11 Saxon bishops, one after the other, were Bishops of Sonning, which afterwards formed part of the diocese of Salisbury. The church was very puzzling and it would be very dangerous to attempt to describe it and give the dates of the different parts of the buildings. He would not have dared to do it had he not obtained the account of the restoration of the church written by Canon

Pearson. He (Mr. Keyser) was not one of those who said that restoration was a thing altogether to be condemned. The main object of their churches was to use them for divine worship. Therefore it was absolutely necessary they should be put into a proper condition for that purpose. But they deplored that sometimes so much evil was done in the name of restoration. There was no question that although the work was well and carefully done their (the antiquarian) side had hardly been properly considered. A great deal had been done which made it absolutely impossible for the ordinary visitor to say which was old and which was new work. Many of the arches and most of the windows had been renewed without following the old style at all. A clerestory had been added. The galleries had been removed, the screens moved, the outer walls cased with flint, the brasses re-arranged and the arch on the north of the chancel taken down and thoroughly restored. The piscina had been moved from the south aisle to the north chancel chapel. He did not regret that the galleries and high pews had been taken away. The pews were very remarkable for their various sizes ; most of them had nice hanging curtains so that people could sleep peacefully during the sermon. There was one relic of Saxon times, and that was part of a cross or coffin lid incorporated in the north-west buttress of the north aisle with the Runic ornament, knotted pattern. Mr. Keyser also dealt in detail with the other historic parts of the church.

SHIPLAKE CHURCH.

Arriving at the quaint little church Mr. Keyser pointed out that it was unusually planned, the tower being at the north-west end instead of at the west. The chancel and north chapel were new, and the whole church had been much renewed. The screen work was probably Flemish. There were some very interesting mural paintings. St. Christopher was represented twice, the paintings being of the 13th and 15th century, and two civilians were represented. Within the niche at the side of the pulpit was seated a figure crowned and with a sceptre, alleged to be Richard, Earl of Cornwall and King of the Romans. There was some fine old glass, which was the glory of the church. It was brought from an Abbey in the north-west of France. The visitors were invited to go to the old vicarage where Tennyson stayed at the time of his marriage.

HARPSDEN COURT.

At the kind invitation of Mr. Leonard Noble, Harpsden Court was the next place visited. There was much to charm one outside

this historic building. The beautifully-kept grounds had assumed their rich summer hue of many colours and besides the blaze of flowers, the curiously-cut box trees at the entrance, representing various animals were a great attraction. But it was inside the building where the archæologists found the richest stores of antiquity and the Rev. P. H. Ditchfield's paper (read by Mr. Keyser) was of great interest. Mr. Ditchfield stated that Leland, who wrote in the time of Henry VIII., describes this house, saying that "the fair Lordship of Harpsden and fair ancient large Manor Place with doobil courts standing in Oxfordshire was half-a-mile of Henle upon Tamise, long-gidth to the Harpendens, gentilmen of fame, and came to the Forsters of Berkshire." So this house was in existence in Tudor times and is a fine specimen of the domestic architecture of that period. The story of the house is closely connected with the beautiful home of the President of the Society, Aldermaston Court, through the family of Forster. Since Roman times the site has been celebrated. A Roman camp exists behind the house and Roman coins had been found there of the later Emperors. In Saxon times this village was in existence. He would not venture upon any attempt to give a conjecture with regard to the origin of the name. It had varied much in form and spelling. It formed part of the Honour of Wallingford was held by Robert de Hapsden and later by the Hardings. The place then passed by marriage to the Forsters of Aldermaston, a distinguished family. They seem to have had a fondness for heiresses and profited well by their matrimonial alliances. By marriage with the heiress of the Hardings they acquired Harpsden, and Sir George Forster, son of Sir Humphery Forster of Harpsden, by marriage with Elizabeth, eldest daughter of John de la Mare, and grand-daughter of Thomas de la Mare, acquired the important manor of Aldermaston, which became the residence of the family. Sir George died in 1533. For some time they retained both residences, but in 1645 sold Harpsden to General Bartholomew Hall, a friend of Oliver Cromwell. We can conjecture a reason for this sale. In 1636 Sir Humphrey Forster began to bulid the noble manor house at Aldermaston, which was burnt down in 1843, and possibly wanting money for his building sold his property here at Harpsden. The Forsters were relatives of Oliver Cromwell, so that it is not probable that the losses caused by the Civil War to so many leading families in England and the confiscations that ensued, had anything to do with the sale. Either just before or just after the house passed into the possession of Bartholo-

new Hall, Cromwell paid a visit here. The building which one sees to-day is only a portion of the great mansion which formerly stood here. Queen Mary paid a visit here and they could still see her room and oratory; and probably Queen Elizabeth, who was entertained by Sir Humphrey at Aldermaston, and in her progresses seems to have stayed in every great home in England, did not pass by these hospitable doors. It must have been a very grand building in its prime, and had seven halls, one of which was known as Beggars Hall, where alms were distributed. A hiding hole formerly existed here. In the drawing-room is a finely decorated ceiling, and they would notice the mantelpiece, which is said to have been carved by Grindling Gibbons (but this is doubtful); and also the excellent panelling in the hall and other chambers. The Hall family held the manor for over 200 years and then sold it in 1855 to Mr. Hodges, of Bolney Court, and it is now the residence of Mr. Leonard Noble, whose guests they were. A visit was also paid to Harpsden Church, the details of which were briefly described by Mr. Keyser. The church was rebuilt or drastically "restored" about 60 years ago.

RECEPTION BY THE MAYOR OF HENLEY.

The excursionists were received at Henley by the Mayor and Mayoress (Mr. and Mrs. E. Chamberlain) and members of the Corporation, and entertained at tea. The company examined various documents relating to the history of Henley. The Mayor extended a hearty welcome to the visitors, and said they recognised the value of such a society to the community. Many of them were wholly absorbed in the affairs of to-day and to-morrow, and neglected the history of the past. Mr. Keyser read a paper written by Mr. Ditchfield on the history of Henley. He said that at one time Henley could boast of its castle. Not far away, where Rotherfield Court now stands, stood a place called Ancastle, which signifies the position of a Roman stronghold or camp, with earthworks, which have now entirely disappeared. But we have traces of Henley's castle in a dispute which arose in 1269 between Prince Edward, afterwards King Edward I., and Gilbert, Earl of Gloucester, when the Earl was compelled to yield this castle, with others, to the powerful Richard, "King of the Romans," brother of Henry III. An examination of the documents of the Corporation, which date back to 1397 proves that Henley was at one time a walled town. With regard to its earlier history, since leaving Reading the Antiquaries entered the boundaries of another kingdom. Wessex was left on the other side of the river, and Mercia was entered—a far-

extending region which was not divided until 912 A.D., when Oxfordshire and other counties were carved out of the old Mercian Kingdom. When Christianity came with the saintly Birinus, and Dorchester became the episcopal centre of a far-extending see, Henley was included in that Diocese, until the bishop's throne was removed in Norman times to Lincoln. Mr. Ditchfield traced the descent of the manors, and also dealt with the municipal history of the borough. No one had yet discovered how old the corporate life of Henley really was ; possibly it dated back to Saxon times. The town possessed four Charters, granted in the reigns of Henry VIII., Elizabeth, George I., and a modern one of 1883. The ledger books dated back to the reign of Richard II. For 120 years the office of Town Clerk has been held by the family of Cooper. The inns of Henley reminded one of the coaching days. Mr. J. F. Cooper (the Town Clerk) read an interesting history of Henley Bridge. The Mayor having been heartily thanked for his hospitality a visit was paid to the Parish Church, after which the members returned home, having spent a very enjoyable and profitable day.

BERKSHIRE ARCHÆOLOGICAL SOCIETY AND NEWBURY DISTRICT FIELD CLUB.—On Monday, June 28th, a goodly company of antiquaries journeyed to the picturesque and interesting little town of Bradford-on-Avon. It was the joint excursion of the two Berkshire Societies which are engaged in the study of the antiquities of the Royal County, and the party numbered about 40. The Secretaries fortunately selected the only fine day with which we have recently been favoured, and the weather was most enjoyable. A start was made from Reading at 9.53, and contingents joined the train at Aldermaston and Newbury.

Arriving at Bradford-on-Avon, the party set out on their pilgrimage, the first stopping place being the old bridge. Here Mr. Ditchfield stated that originally the bridge was only sufficiently wide enough for the passage of pack-horses. The ribbed portions of the southernmost arches, with the pier on which the chapel stood, were early 14th century work. In the time of James I., a second bridge was built alongside the first, in order to make a sufficiently wide road for vehicles. It had been repaired in 1501, and in 1617 an order was made for the restoration of "the very fair bridge consisting of many goodly arches of free-stone," which had fallen into a ruinous state, the cost of the repairs being estimated at 200 marks. The chapel on the bridge was pointed out—not an unusual feature

of the mediæval bridges—Mr. Ditchfield mentioning that which formerly stood on the old bridge at Caversham. It belonged to the Hospital of St. Margaret, which Leland described as “an hospitale of the Kinge’s of Englandes foundation,” and stood formerly where the G.W. Railway crosses the road. The chapel itself, which Aubrey describes as the “Chapel for Masse in the midst of the bridge,” was rebuilt when the bridge was widened, and was at one time used as a lock-up.

The party then walked to the Hall—formerly known as the Duke’s or Kingston House—where they were welcomed by Mr. Moulton, the owner, who described its history. It was built by the family of Hall, who were rich clothiers of Bradford, and it passed by marriage to the Duke of Kingston. The famous Duchess lived there. It was afterwards sold, and was at one time used as a wool warehouse. The father of the present owner purchased the property and restored the house. The garden front, with its bay windows, its terraces with steps and parapet, form an effective piece of design, and the interior panelling and mantel-pieces are very fine.

SAXON CHURCH.

The next place visited was the Anglo-Saxon Church. When the visitors were assembled in the chapel Mr. Ditchfield gave a short history of the town and described the architecture of that most interesting building. He said that Leland wrote of Bradford as “the praty clothinge town.” Its old name was Bradford, the Broadford, the words “on Avon” being added not earlier than 1858, at the suggestion of the late Canon Jones. It was a very picturesque place built in a sequestered vale, with its grey stone houses rising one above the other. Some of the houses had been refaced by the brothers Adam. It was formerly part of the kingdom of Wessex, having been captured from the British tribes by King Cenwealth, who fought a battle here and overran the whole country north of the Mendips. Then came St. Aldhelm, a relative of Ina, King of the West Saxons, who built a small monastery here, and they liked to think that that little church in which they were assembled was the actual church of the monastery erected by the saint, who also founded Malmesbury Abbey. After that time Bradford became a place of importance. In 957 a great Council or Witanagemote was held here, when St. Dunstan was elected Bishop of Worcester. In 1001, when the Danes were ravaging the country, the manor was given to the Abbess of Shaftesbury to furnish a secure retreat in this retired valley for her nuns and for the precious relics of St.

Edward the Martyr. Little is known of the history of the town for five centuries after the Norman Conquest, save that it must have been fairly prosperous, as the inhabitants set about building their noble parish church. King John visited Bradford in 1216, and in 1295 it sent two Members to Parliament. The wool trade increased its prosperity. Leland said of it, as he said of the Berkshire town of Abingdon, "it standeth by clothing." In 1331 broadcloth began to be made in England, and Edward III. supported the industry by giving protection to Flemish weavers, dyers, and fullers. Several noted clothiers resided here, the Hortons, Halls, Lucas, Methuens, Yerbury, and others. Several Flemish workmen were brought over, including "Richard Jonson, Hectrie, his wife, and seven children, from Amsterdam." The part of the town where the foreigners lived is still called Dutch Barton. There were riots in the town when machinery was introduced. Great excitement existed here when a Pretender, calling himself the Duke of Monmouth, was captured in the town.

Mr. Ditchfield then described the Saxon chapel in which they were assembled. He said that it was unique, as although there were many other Saxon churches in the country they had been altered in subsequent ages, whereas this one remained very much as it was in early times. It was at one time called the Skull House. It had been used as a charity school house, having been given for that purpose to the town in 1715 by Anthony Methuen, a member of the family of rich clothiers. Canon Jones has the credit of discovering it about 50 years ago. It was then so surrounded by cottages built up against it and concealed by ivy that no one knew of the architectural beauties of the building. It was carefully restored, the adjoining buildings removed, and the whole beauty of the fabric disclosed. The building was cruciform when the south porch was intact. The great height compared with the length and width was very characteristic of Saxon work. The chancel was square-ended according to the English type. The enrichment of the walls was in two storeys; from a plain plinth rise pilaster strips which are stepped in three degrees at their base, and above is a series of arcading, which seems to have been cut out of the face of the wall. All the doorways slope inwards from the base, showing that the builders had not much confidence in the strength of their arches. The windows were round headed and double splayed. Over the chancel arch were two sculptured angels with wings extended, a nimbus, and over one arm a napkin. Professor G. Baldwin Brown fixes the date of

the chapel as the latter part of the 10th century, but there are several arguments in favour of an earlier date.

THE PARISH CHURCH.

The Parish Church was then visited, which originally consisted of a nave and chancel of early Norman work. The chancel was lengthened in the 14th century, and two chantries added in the 15th on the north side of the nave. The tower is of late 15th century work. There are some interesting tombs and a fragment of the gallery front of the rood loft. The house of the old parish clerk, Edward Orpin, the subject of Gainsborough's portrait in the National Gallery, was viewed with much interest.

After luncheon at the Swan Hotel the visitors drove to the interesting house of

GREAT CHALFIELD MANOR.

This is an early Tudor structure retaining much of the old feudal planning, and dates back to the time of Henry VI. It is now undergoing a very complete restoration. It was built in 1460-70 by Thomas Tropenell. Some interesting discoveries have been made during the work, including a mural painting supposed to represent King Henry VI., or the builder of the house, and two masks, through the eyes of which the lord could mark the behaviour of his retainers in the hall. A little church adjoins the hall, dating from the 13th century, though most of it was built in the 15th.

SOUTH WRAXALL MANOR AND CHURCH.

The Vicar described the church, and the house was next visited. The party was welcomed by Mr. E. Richardson Cox, the tenant and restorer of the house. Mr. Ditchfield stated that it was built in the second quarter of the 15th century by Robert Long, who died in 1477. The principal parts of the house of that period were the great hall with its porch, the parlour at the south end, with kitchens adjoining and host's chamber over, and the buttery north of the hall with drawing-room over. The timber roof of the hall is of the early hammer-beam type. The gateway, with beautiful oriel and porter's dwelling over, is of early 15th century work. Several alterations were made in the early part of the reign of James I., when the carved work of the minstrels' gallery and the fireplace in the hall were erected, and the character of the principal front remodelled. Mr. Cox conducted the visitors over the house and gardens. He said that it was at one time a school and that Charles Kingsley and General Lawrence were pupils there.

The time was rather short for catching the train at Bradford. However, the journey was accomplished and the three brakes managed to arrive at the station just in time. Tea was prepared for the party at Westbury, when there was a stop of a quarter of an hour, and then an excellent express conveyed the visitors to Newbury and Reading. The excursion was much enjoyed by all who took part in it, and the Secretaries of the two Societies were heartily thanked for their excellent arrangements.

Notes and Queries

RELATING TO BERKS, BUCKS AND OXON.

Communications are invited upon all subjects of Antiquarian or Architectural interest relating to the three counties. Correspondents are requested to write as plainly as possible, on one side of the paper only, with REPLIES, QUERIES and NOTES on SEPARATE SHEETS, and the name of the writer appended to each communication.

Notes.

MS. ARCHD OXON. — Berks c 29/64, Chieveley, 1590. The Church Wardens present "that diverse there be of Nuberie to the number of lx that everie Sundaye repayre to the Church of Chieveley to heare theare vicar preache and they knowe not how they maye debarre them." Who was this remarkable preacher?—W. P. ELLIS.

THE BERKS ARCHITECTURAL SOCIETY AND THE BERKS COUNTY COUNCIL'S NEW OFFICES.—My dear Ditchfield,—In your report of our Society for 1908-9, page 4, you call the attention of the County Council to the "need" for providing a room for the safe "depository of ancient documents." Can anything be done to save Reading (my native town) from having the incongruous elevation of the first-awarded design of Messrs. Warwick and Hall put on the site between the two Gothic buildings, the Reading Abbey and St. Lawrence's Church? It is not perhaps so jarring as Clacy's elevation of the Assize Courts, when, as now, it was proposed to make the Abbey Gate subservient to the new buildings. The article in the "Reading Mercury" of the 18th inst., page 3, begins a paragraph on that subject thus: "In their external treatment the authors of the winning design have wisely not attempted to follow in any way, except in the maintenance of the chief horizontal lines, the design of the Assize Courts, but have designed a building thoroughly in consonance with the atmosphere of old Reading." What old Reading? Not the Abbey and the three parish churches and Greyfriars! Here is a splendid opportunity of levelling