



The Royal Commission on Historical Monuments.

(A Lecture delivered before the Berks Archæological Society, on January 19th, 1911, by the Rev. P. H. Ditchfield, Hon. Secretary).

I BEG to call your attention to the first Report issued by the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments which had recently appeared. The Commission has long been waited for, and has begun its work well. The Secretary of the National Trust has told us in this room the sad story of the disappearance of much of the natural beauty of our scenery, and of the old buildings and places of interest connected with the history of the country, and how much England is behind other nations in the care they bestowed upon their ancient monuments. Two years ago the Commission was formed of which Lord Burghclere is the chairman, and the names of the other members of that body inspire the confidence of all who love antiquities. Their work was to make an inventory of the ancient and historical monuments and constructions connected with or illustrative of the contemporary culture, civilisation and conditions of life of the people in England from the earliest times to the year 1700, and to specify those which seemed most worthy of preservation. These included pre-historic monuments and earthworks, Roman monuments and Roman earthworks, English ecclesiastical monuments, English secular monuments, dwelling houses, mount and bailey castles, homestead moats, were all included in the survey. The first interim report is on the county of Hertford, and the report is a most valuable document. Lord Burghclere has written to urge that the Berkshire survey should be prepared for by the active co-operation of the members of this Society. Buckinghamshire is to be the next county which would be surveyed. The lecturer urged that Berkshire should be divided into districts, and advocated a scheme for the extension of the work of the society, whereby each town should have its own local secretary and committee. This was the 40th year of the Society's existence since its re-constitution in 1871, and should be marked by an enlargement of its scope, and the extension of its operations. As regards the need of the work of the commission it

might be said that we have begun our quest too late ; that so much has already vanished that it is hardly worth while to record what is left. Although much is gone, there is still, however, much remaining that is good, that reveals the artistic skill and taste of our forefathers, that recalls the wonders of old-time. It will be our endeavour to tell of the old country houses that time has spared, the cottages that grace the village green, the stern grey walls that still guard some few of our towns, the old moat halls and public buildings.

Our age is an age of progress. *Altiora peto* is its motto. The spirit of progress is in the air, and lures its votaries on to higher flights. Sometimes they discover that they have been following a will-o'-the-wisp, that leads them into a bog and quagmire whence no escape is possible. The England of a century, or even of half a century ago, has vanished, and we find ourselves in the midst of a busy, bustling world that knows no rest or peace. Inventions tread upon each other heels in one long vast bewildering procession. We look back at the peaceful reign of the pack-horse, the rumbling wagon, the advent of the merry coaching days, the "Lightning" and the "Quicksilver," the chaining of the rivers with locks and bars, the network of canals that spread over the whole country, and then the first shriek of the railway engine startled the echoes of the countryside, a poor powerless thing that had to be pulled up the steep gradients by a chain attached to a big stationary engine at the summit. But it was the herald of the doom of old-world England. Highways and coaching roads, canals and rivers, were abandoned and deserted. The old coachmen, once lords of the road, ended their days in the poorhouse, and steam, almighty steam, ruled everywhere.

Now the wayside inn wakes up again with the bellow of the motor car. In a few years the air will be conquered, and autophones, balloons, flying machines and air ships, will drop down us from the skies and add a new terror to life.

Not in vain the distance beacons.
Forward, forward let us range,
Let the great world spin for ever
Down the ringing groves of change.

Life is for ever changing, and doubtless everything is for the best in this best of all possible worlds ; but the antiquary may be forgiven for mourning over the destruction of many of the picturesque features of bygone times and revelling in the recollections of the past. The half-educated and the progressive—I attach no political meaning to the term—delight in their present environment, and care not to inquire too deeply into the origin of things ; the study of evolution and

development is out of their sphere ; but yet as Dean Church once wisely said, " In our eagerness for improvement it concerns us to be on our guard against the temptation of thinking that we can have the fruit or the flower, and yet destroy the root. . . . It concerns us that we do not despise our birthright and cast away our heritage of gifts and of powers, which we may lose but not recover."

Every day witnesses the destruction of some old link with the past life of the people of England. A stone here, a buttress there—it matters not ; these are of no consequence to the innovator or the iconoclast. If it may be our privilege to prevent any further spoliation of the heritage of Englishmen, if we can awaken any respect or reverence for the work of our forefathers, the labours of both artist and author will not have been in vain. Our heritage has been sadly diminished, but it has not yet altogether disappeared, and it is our object to try to record some of those objects of interest which are so fast perishing and vanishing from our view, in order that the remembrance of all the treasures that our country possesses may not disappear with them.

The beauty of our English scenery has in many parts of the country entirely vanished, never to return. Coal-pits, blasting furnaces, factories, and railways have converted once smiling landscapes and pretty villages into an inferno of black smoke, hideous mounds of ashes, huge mills with lofty chimneys belching forth clouds of smoke that kills vegetation and covers the leaves of trees and plants with exhalations. I remember attending at Oxford a lecture delivered by the late Mr. Ruskin. He produced a charming drawing by Turner of a beautiful old bridge spanning a clear stream, the banks of which were clad with trees and foliage. The sun shone brightly, and the sky was blue, with fleeting clouds. " This is what you are doing with your scenery," said the lecturer, as he took up his pallet and brushes ; he began to paint on the glass that covered the picture, and in a few minutes the scene was transformed. Instead of a beautiful bridge a hideous iron girder structure spanned the stream which was no longer pellucid and clear, but black as the Styx ; instead of the trees arose a monstrous mill with a tall chimney vomiting black smoke that spread in heavy clouds, hiding the sun and the blue sky. " That is what you are doing with your scenery," concluded Mr. Ruskin—a true picture of the penalty we pay for trade progress, and the pursuit of wealth. We are losing faith in the testimony of our poets and painters to the beauty of the English landscape which has inspired their art, and much of the charm of our

scenery in many parts has vanished. We happily have some of it left still where factories are not, some interesting objects that artists love to paint. It is well that they should be recorded before they too pass away.

Old houses of both peer and peasant and their contents are sooner or later doomed to destruction. Historic mansions full of priceless treasures amassed by succeeding generations of old families fall a prey to relentless fire. Old panelled rooms and the ancient floor-timbers understand not the latest experiments in electric lighting and yield themselves to the flames with scarce a struggle. Our forefathers were content with hangings to keep out the draughts and open fire-places to keep them warm. They were a hardy race, and feared not a touch or breath of cold. Their degenerate sons must have an elaborate heating apparatus, which again distresses the old timbers of the house and fires their hearts of oak. Our forefathers, indeed, left behind them a terrible legacy of danger—that beam in the chimney, which has caused the destruction of many country houses. Perhaps it was not so great a source of danger in the days of the old wood fires. It is deadly enough when huge coal fires burn in the grates. It is a dangerous subtle thing. For days, or even for a week or two, it will smoulder and smoulder; and then at last it will blaze up, and the old house with all its precious contents is wrecked.

The power of the purse of American millionaires tends greatly to the varnishing of much that is English—the treasures of English art, rare pictures and books, and even of houses. Some nobleman or gentleman, through the extravagance of himself or his ancestors, or on account of the pressure of death duties, finds himself impoverished. Some of our great art dealers hear of his unhappy state, and knowing that he has some fine paintings—a Vandyck or a Romney—offer him twenty-five or thirty thousand pounds for a work of art. The temptation proves irresistible. The picture is sold, and soon finds its way into the gallery of a rich American, no one in England having the power or good taste to purchase it. We spend our money in other ways. The following conversation was overheard at Christie's: "Here is a beautiful thing; you should buy it," said the speaker to a newly fledged baronet. "I'm afraid I can't afford it," replied the baronet. "Not afford it?" replied his companion. "It will cost you infinitely less than a baronetcy and do you infinitely more credit." The new baronet seemed rather offended. At the great art sales rare folios of Shakespeare, pictures, Sevres, miniatures from English houses are put up for auction, and of course find their way to

America. Sometimes our cousins from across the Atlantic fail to secure their treasures. They have striven very eagerly to buy Milton's cottage at Chalfont St. Giles, for transportation to America; but this effort has happily been successfully resisted. The carved table in the cottage was much sought after, and was with difficulty retained against an offer of £150. An old window of fifteenth-century workmanship in an old house at Shrewsbury was nearly exploited by an enterprising American for the sum of £250; and some years ago an application was received by the Home Secretary for permission to unearth the body of William Penn, the founder of Pennsylvania, from its grave in the burial-grounds of Jordans, near Chalfont St. Giles, and transport it to Philadelphia. This action was successfully opposed by the trustees of the burial-ground, but it was considered expedient to watch the ground for some time to guard against the possibility of any illicit attempts at removal. The American purchaser has been more successful at Ipswich, where in 1907 a Tudor house and corner-post, which had been sold for £75, was secured by a London firm for shipment to America.

Wanton destruction is another cause of the disappearance of old mansions. Fashions change even in house building. Many people prefer new lamps to old ones, though the old ones can summon genii and recall the glories of the past, the associations of centuries of family life, and the stories of ancestral prowess. Sometimes fashion decrees the downfall of old houses. Such a fashion raged at the beginning of the last century, when every one wanted a brand-new house built after the Palladian style; and the old weather-beaten pile that had shaltered the family for generations, and was of good old English design with nothing foreign or strange about it, was compelled to give place to a new-fangled dwelling-place which was neither beautiful nor comfortable. Indeed, a great wit once advised the builder of one of these mansions to hire a room on the other side of the road and spend his days looking at his Palladian house, but be sure not to live there.

Mr. Ditchfield also described the destruction of city walls, old inns, churches, municipal buildings, and other subjects on which he had treated in his recently published book, "Vanishing England." The object of this society was to check vandalism, to assist in preserving some of the links that connect our time with the England of the past, and in increasing the appreciation of the treasures that remain by the Englishmen of to-day.

HINTS TO WORKERS.

In the above lecture it is stated that Buckinghamshire is the next county to be undertaken by the Royal Commission, and Berkshire will not long be delayed. Lord Burghclere and the other Commissioners would be grateful for the assistance of all antiquaries in these counties in preparing a schedule of such monuments as come within the scope of their enquiry. These are :

- (1) Prehistoric monuments and earthworks.
- (2) Roman monuments and Roman earthworks.
- (3) English ecclesiastical monuments.
- (4) English secular monuments, including dwelling houses, mounts and bailey castles, moats, etc.
- (5) Unclassified monuments such as undateable earthworks, unopened tumuli, etc.

In the case of ecclesiastical monuments there should be a few words on the situation and material of the monument, a statement as to the historical development of its various parts, its most remarkable features, an architectural description of its details, the fittings of churches in alphabetical order, and a general statement as to its structural condition. Photographs would be of immense value.

An example would be helpful. We will take

ABBOTS LANGLEY.

Roman. Dwelling House.—Situation—found 1825; condition—no remains above ground.

Ecclesiastical. Parish church of St. Laurence, stands on high ground a little N. of village, built of flint rubble with Totternhoe stone dressings, roofed with tiles. Earliest part is nave with late 12th century arcades. West tower c. 1200. S. chapel early 14th century, chancel rebuilt c. 1400. In 15th century upper part of the tower rebuilt. . . South porch added 18th century. 12th century arcades especially interesting on account of early date, and the windows of S. chapel are fine examples of 14th century work.

Then follows architectural description with measurements (internal). Chancel (39½ ft. by 14½ ft.) has E. window of three lights. In N. wall are three windows of two lights each, etc., etc.

Fittings. Brasses and Indents. In S. chapel indent of Rauffe Horwode, 1498, etc., etc. Font, with octagonal panelled bowl and stem, bearing traces of paint and gilding, 15th century.

Glass. In N. Window fragment of St. Laurence.

Monument on S. wall of Anne Combe, 1640, of marble.

Paintings. On E. wall chapel, figures of two bishops. In N. aisle table of commandments, dated 1627.

Piscina in S. wall of chancel with 14th century back, otherwise modern.

Secular.—Homestead. Moat in garden of manor house.

Cottages. One near church of timber and plaster, 17th century, two at Kitens Green of brick and timber and may be of 17th century.

Brakespears, a farmhouse in hamlet of Bedmond appears partly of 17th century brick and timber construction.

The Lawn, a house, now two cottages, said to have been a hunting lodge of Charles I., and is probably about 1642, a date which appears over one of the fireplaces (then follow a good description of the house, its construction, fireplace with ornamentation, ceiling of good plaster work, etc.)

We shall be glad to publish in this Journal lists and descriptions of monuments based upon the above plan, and these will be of great service to the Commissioners when they are preparing their Survey for Berkshire or Bucks.

Feet of Fines for Berkshire.

Transcribed by L. J. Acton Pile.

(Continued from page 48, Vol. 16.)

HILARY 20 GEO. II. *(continued).*

(815.) Joseph Fry *and* Francis Carter the elder *and* Martha, w; house, etc., and land in Blewberry. £60.

(816.) Gabriel Malkett, Esq. *and* Peircy Hatch *and* Jane, w *and* Elizabeth Hartling als Harding; houses, etc., and lands, etc., in Winkfield. £60.

(817.) Edward King the younger *and* Thomas Crane, Michael Crane *and* William Crane; houses in Wantinge als Wantage. £200.

(818.) Henry Gosden *and* Ann Bolt, widow *and* Edward Dalbee *and* Mary, w *and* Richard Finch *and* Elizabeth, w; houses, etc., and land in Winkfield *and* Warfield. £60.

(819.) Andrew Allam *and* Richard Higgs *and* Ann, w; barn, etc., and lands in West Hanney. £60.

(820.) William Choules *and* Joseph Waldron *and* Mary, w; land, etc., in psh Chipping Lambourne. £60.