

The Berks, Bucks and Oxon Archæological Journal.

In Memoriam,

Charles Edward Keyser,

President of the

Berkshire Archæological Society.

R.I.P.

IT is with the deepest sorrow and profound regret that we have to record the passing away from earth of our beloved President who for so many years has helped and guided the fortunes of our Society, and earned the gratitude and affection of all our members. Ever since he came to live in his beautiful home at Aldermaston he took the keenest interest in our Society and was ever ready to promote its welfare, bringing to its aid a mind well stored in antiquarian lore and a love of archæology, especially in all that concerns his particular branch of study, the Norman period and Church architecture.

We valued him not only for his learning and knowledge, but for his charming personality and warmth of his friendship to us all. He was the friend of every member of our Society. Always courteous, kind, and considerate for others, he possessed

the true characteristics of an English gentleman, and his memory will be cherished by all his friends, and especially by those whose privilege it has been to enjoy his society in the ranks of the Berkshire Archæological Society and in many other walks of life. He was a great leader, and his loss will be felt far and wide, notably among the fraternity of Freemasons, amongst whom his name was a household word, not only in England but throughout the wide world. It may well be said that we shall never look upon his like again, but he has left a memory that will never fade. He lived a very full life, interesting himself in so many pursuits, movements, benefactions, that it is difficult to compress in a brief space the record of his achievements. What might not be said of his innumerable acts of private kindness, of his magnificent generosity, of his devotion to many schemes for the benefit of humanity? These would provide material to fill a volume. He has passed away, but he will always live in the hearts of those who loved him and now mourn their loss.

Charles Edward Keyser was born on September 10th, 1847, the son of Charles Keyser who passed away in 1892, and of Margaret, younger daughter of Edward Blore, F.R.S., F.S.A., D.C.L. Mr. Blore was an architect of great distinction, and probably from him our late friend inherited his love for architecture. From his father he inherited great wealth. He was educated at Eton and Trinity College, Cambridge, and always maintained an affectionate regard for both those institutions. Early in his career he manifested a love for archæology. He took many walking tours throughout England, examining churches, making notes on them, and especially noting Norman buildings and doorways, laying the foundation of that knowledge which enabled him in after years to produce a *magnum opus* on *Sculptured Tympana and Lintels*, published in 1904, a revised and enlarged edition of which appeared in 1928. He was endowed with a wonderful memory and could recall the architectural features of remote churches in far distant counties.

The study of mural paintings greatly attracted him, and he issued in 1883 for the South Kensington Museum a *List of Buildings having Mural Decorations*, which is the standard work on the subject, and from which subsequent writers have largely borrowed. It always seemed to me as an instance of "poetic justice" that one who had devoted so much time and study to this subject should, when he was restoring his own church at Aldermaston, be allowed to discover beneath the plaster some very interesting examples of this ancient art. These he added to by some modern mural paintings, the work of his old friend, Mr. Philip Newman, F.S.A., who designed for him the school chapel at Bushey. A very striking painting at Aldermaston is that of "Solomon blessing the Temple."

In later life he used to make pilgrimages, accompanied by two expert photographers, to many churches, taking notes and subsequently publishing elaborate monographs and delivering lectures to our Society, the British Archæological Association and other institutions, illustrated by a wealth of lantern slides showing the minutest details of the ecclesiastical buildings. He greatly enjoyed delivering these lectures and found time to visit many learned Societies, the Society of Antiquaries, the Archæological Institute, and even small village gatherings of Women's Institutes.

Mr. Keyser's connection with our Society began soon after he took up his residence in Berkshire at Aldermaston. Knowing his reputation for antiquarian research, I wrote to him soon after his arrival, and claimed his interest and support of our Society, and soon he began to contribute articles on Berkshire Norman doorways which were afterwards followed by the more elaborate series to which I have referred. When our former President, Sir George Russell, Bart., passed away, he was immediately elected as his successor and worthily has he fulfilled the duties of that position. Besides his lectures, each of which, including its publication and numerous photographic illustrations, cost him about a hundred pounds, he was seldom absent from our meetings

and excursions which always delighted him. He was an excellent chairman and lacked not humour and good nature, ever ready to smooth over any difficulties or disputes that might arise.

In spite of his antiquarian pursuits our late President devoted himself largely to the public service. Of his stupendous work for Freemasonry it would be superfluous to write in this notice which will be read chiefly by non-members of the Order, save to note that he attained to the highest rank in the fraternity, devoting vast sums of money to its charities and benevolent institutions. Every year he gave thousands of pounds to these objects, built the chapel of the Boys' School at Bushey, and recently, when on one occasion the subscription list at a Festival was rather lower than usual, he subscribed £10,000 to make up the deficiency. This, in conversation with the present writer, he regarded as a trifle. I expect that no one will ever know the extent of his magnificent generosity.

He was closely associated with the public life of Hertfordshire and Berkshire, serving on the County Council and being Justice of the Peace of both counties, and High Sheriff and Deputy Lieutenant of Berkshire. In early life, after his marriage to Mary Emma, youngest daughter of Thomas Bagnall, J.P., of Newberries, near Watford, he resided at Warren House, Stanmore, and Merry Hill House, Bushey, and was an enthusiastic cricketer, and captain of the Herts County Club. Many of us remember the pleasant matches played upon his private cricket ground at Aldermaston.

Thirty-six years ago, in 1893, Mr. Keyser came to Berkshire, having purchased the Aldermaston estate, one of the finest in the shire and not without historical interest. The house is situate in a deer park and is beautiful in every respect. It looks down upon the remainder of the forest where William the Conqueror and succeeding monarchs hunted the deer, and upon lovely woods and a superb lake. Mr. Keyser used sometimes to regret that his public duties often prevented him from enjoying the amenities of his property, and he told me that if he was able

to stay one week-day in a fortnight at home he thought he had done well. But he was nearly always at home on Sundays, when he read the lessons in church, and for many years taught in the Sunday School, a laudable practice that few squires attain unto.

The Manor of Aldermaston has been held by many distinguished families ; the Achards, Delamores, and the Forsters. The old manor house stood close to the church, and was built by Sir Humphrey Forster in 1636, and was visited by Evelyn the diarist. It was partly destroyed by fire in 1843 when Mr. Higford Burr held it, who rebuilt it on a site further from the church. When Mr. Keyser bought the property he greatly added to it, and made it the comfortable home where he loved to entertain his guests.

Ashmole, the antiquary, having married Lady Mainwaring, sister of Sir Humphrey, lived some time at the old mansion, not without opposition from his relatives. When the Forsters died out Lord Stawell came in, who was a great gambler, giving rise to the local proverb "when clubs are trumps Aldermaston House quakes." His coronet adorns the beautiful iron work of the entrance gates. By marriage, the Congreve family acquired the estate, and remained there till it was purchased by Mr. Higford Burr in 1843, whose son sold it to Mr. Keyser.

In addition to his many other activities, he took a keen interest in politics espousing the Conservative cause, and three times unsuccessfully contested the Borough of Reading. It would be vain to record all the learned societies of which Mr. Keyser was President, Vice-President, or Fellow. Some few may be mentioned. Besides being President of our Berkshire Society he occupied the same office of the British Archæological Association which was dear to his heart. He was Vice-President of the Royal Archæological Institute, Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries, both of England and Scotland, of the Royal Society of Arts, President of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archæological Society, Hampshire Field Club, Newbury and District Field Club, and he was Hon. Colonel of the Middlesex Cadet Brigade,

and played a prominent part in county and local business, and in financial affairs. He was fond of shooting, and his "shoot" at Aldermaston was a red letter day amongst his neighbouring sportsmen. Bowls was his favourite relaxation in his later years.

He has left behind him to mourn his loss, his widow, one son, Charles Norman Keyser, Lieut. 20th Hussars, and three daughters. Two sisters survive him : Mrs. Sperling, who loved to accompany her brother in our congresses and excursions, and Sister Agnes, who was for many years with another sister, recently deceased, the responsible head of King Edward the Seventh's Hospital for Officers in Grosvenor Gardens, and enjoyed the friendship of our late monarch.

Such, in brief, is the record of the life of our esteemed late President whose name is writ large in the annals of our time. We have very grateful remembrance for all that he accomplished for our Society, and for the able, courteous and unfailing services which he rendered to us and to English archæology. It is sad to reflect that we no longer have his presence with us ; but the memory of one who loved his fellow men will remain with us always and be to future generations a synonym of high character, noble deeds, and generous action that will not pass away.

P. H. DITCHFIELD.