

The Berkshire Archæological Journal.

In Memoriam.

Peter Hampson Ditchfield, M.A.,

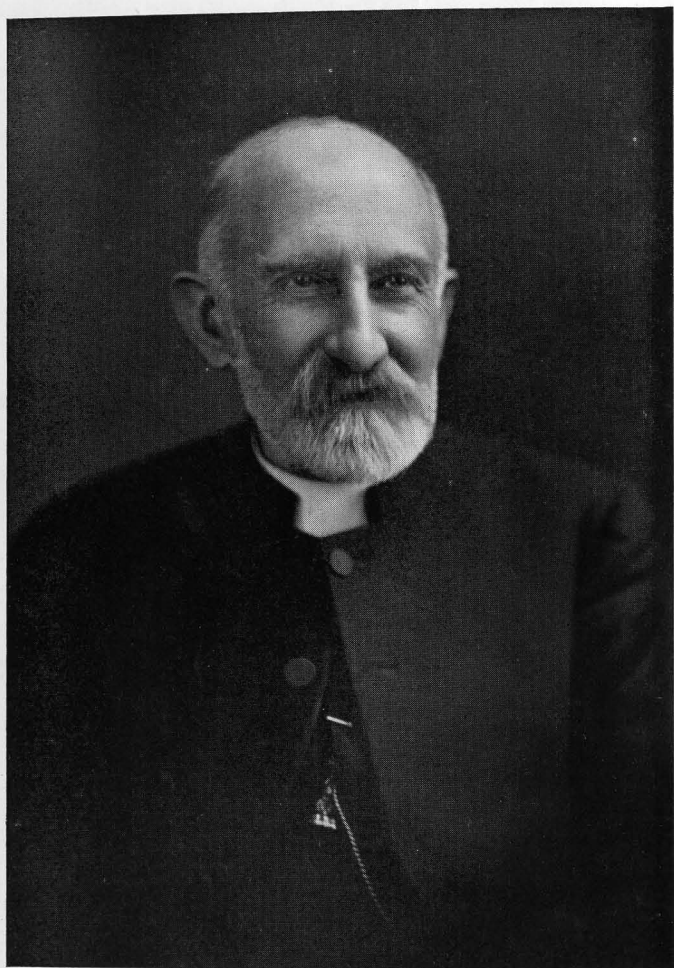
President of

The Berkshire Archæological Society.

ON the 23rd September, 1930, the Reverend Peter Hampson Ditchfield, M.A., Rector of Barkham, and for thirty-five years Editor of this *Journal*, passed to his rest. It is the first and sad task of his successor in the office which he so ably filled to try and place on record what this Society owes to his untiring energy and diligence in the archaeological field.

Peter Hampson Ditchfield was born at Westhoughton in Lancashire on the 20th April, 1854, and was educated at the Royal Grammar School, Clitheroe. He proceeded to Oriel College, Oxford, and took his degree of B.A. in 1877. In 1878 he was ordained and held his first curacy at Sandhurst under the Rev. J. L. Randall, afterwards Bishop of Reading. From here, in 1880, he went as Curate to Christ Church, Reading, leaving there in 1886, at the request of the late Mr. John Walter, of Bearwood, to take up the more important duties of Rector of Barkham. He held this living until his death.

The past, and all it means to a studious mind, was for the Rector of Barkham an abiding joy. Every phase of archaeology had an interest for him; but the moving pageantry and romance of English mediaeval life were dearer to his heart than the more abstruse science of pre-history and pre-Conquest



PETER HAMPSON DITCHFIELD, M.A.,
President of
The Berkshire Archaeological Society,
1929—1930.

research. The parson and the clerk ; the church and the manor house ; the village community and their customs found in him an eager and an eloquent recorder. He wove about them a pleasant enchantment and the past was good to look back upon when the pen of Peter Hampson Ditchfield recaptured it for our pleasure and profit. He repeopled vanished England with a glamour that appealed to a large public outside the domains of the specialist and the student. He surveyed a wide field ; from the magnitude and richness of cathedral architecture to the modest accommodation of the wayside shrine ; from the glories of the stately homes of England to the modest trappings of the labourer's village cot ; from the pageantry of London Town and its Civic Companies to the rural diversions of a bygone age. To him the land of Shakespeare was indeed a land of dear renown.

From his early years he was eager to record his impressions in print, and few know that long before his name had become widely known in the literary field, fugitive articles on " Sport " appeared in various periodicals under the name of " Peter Hampson." He was a keen cricketer ; a reliable " bat " ; and was in early days occasionally found at neighbouring meets. He wrote one novel, " The Sorceress of Paris," but very quickly recognised that whatever literary success he was destined to achieve it was not to be in fiction. He was a delightful letter-writer and could frame both the sympathetic and the congratulatory epistle in well-chosen and appropriate language.

His published works are many and varied. Some of them ran into several editions ; among them being " Cathedrals of Great Britain," " Handbook of Gothic Architecture," " The Parish Clerk," and " Vanishing England." Other works well received by the reading public were " The Old Time Parson," " The Old English Country Squire," " The Manor Houses of England," " The Charm of the English Village " and " Country Folk."

He was general Editor of the " Memorials of the Counties History " series, and with Dr. Page of the " Victoria County History of Berkshire." He also wrote " The Pageant of Reading "

which was an attractive feature of the Mayoralty of his friend, the late Sir G. Stewart Abram. His contributions to magazines and periodicals were numerous and not confined to this country. His energy was abounding, but his manner quiet and unobtrusive. Volume after volume flowed from his pen with tireless regularity and such was the vigour of his application that he contrived to take an active part in many undertakings other than the calls of his parish and the subjects near and dear to him. He was local Organising Secretary of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel from 1890 to 1907, and for nearly thirty years Diocesan Inspector of Schools. He held high office in the Masonic craft and contributed learned articles thereanent to the leading Masonic journals. It can truly be said of him that in every walk of life in which he was willing to enter he was soon induced to take a leading part.

His courtesy and kindness were proverbial. His store of knowledge was at the disposal of all who cared to avail themselves of it and from distant lands his advice was sought and his sympathies enlisted. Within the sheltered walls of his parsonage dwelt peace and contentment with countless tomes of literary lore. In the village in which he had been guide, philosopher and friend for over forty years, he was beloved of his flock, and no contrary winds of religious or social strife ever ruffled the placid waters of his retreat. His study was a scene of orderly disorder—for which he was most apologetic—but he somehow managed to keep one chair sufficiently free of books and MSS. to afford his visitor a precarious ease. As a callow youth, some thirty years ago, the present writer took a journey to Barkham in search of antiquarian lore, and the generous entertainment, both for body and mind, with which he was regaled is still a pleasant and abiding memory.

For thirty-eight years he was Hon. Secretary of the Berkshire Archaeological Society and gave ungrudgingly of his time and energy to its interests. He loved the Royal County and its historic monuments; its sweeping sunlit downs; its age-old hamlets and their grey-walled churches; its timbered cottages and moss-grown barns; its ancestral manor houses and its rich

vales and winding lanes ; he loved them all with an intensity that is reflected in many of his writings. During the latter years of his life the Society relied almost exclusively upon his direction. The death in 1929 of his friend, Charles Edward Keyser, came as a great blow to him at a time when he was feeling the weight of increasing years and diminishing physical vigour. It was in the nature of things that he should be asked by the Council to accept the position of President of the Society and for one brief year he held this office with dignity and undiminished zeal. Throughout his long and busy life he was helped and encouraged by the wise counsel and loving attention of his wife, who has received from far and near countless expressions of condolence to support her in the day of her trial.

He had received many requests to undertake lecturing tours in America ; but could not bring himself to leave, even for a brief while, the pleasant scenes and varied interests of his Berkshire village home. Whether as host at Barkham or shepherding members on interesting archaeological excursions he was a genial companion and a cultured guide.

The name of Peter Hampson Ditchfield will always be found among those writers who, by their pleasant diction and wide appeal, add not a little to our store of cultured reading. But his name will be most intimately associated with the Society for whose success he laboured so long and so loyally and those who are left to mourn his passing will ever remember the kindness of heart and charm of manner that endeared him to all who were fortunate enough to be connected with him in his many enterprises.

He lies buried in the churchyard of the Church within whose walls he had been a faithful servant of God for forty-four years. His epitaph might well be :

*" Let nothing cause thy heart to quail ;
Launch out thy boate, haule up thy saile,
Put from the shore ;
And at the lengthe thou shalt attaine
Unto the port that shall remaine
For evermore."*

ERNEST W. DORMER.