

## Reviews.

THOMAS BEACH. By ELISE S. BEACH. (London: John Bale, Sons and Danielsson, Ltd., 12/6 net.).

Miss Elise Beach, of Reading, has given an exceedingly able account of all that is known of her great-great-grand uncle, Thomas Beach, portrait painter and friend of many of the notable folk of the west country in the 18th century. Born at Milton Abbas in 1738 and dying in 1806, his working days occupied what is perhaps the most artistic period in English history. Giants such as Reynolds, Gainsborough, Romney, Raeburn and Lawrence were contemporary with him and it is no small tribute to his genius that to-day his works are sometimes mistaken for those of the greater artists of the time.

As a boy he went to the ancient grammar school at Milton Abbas, where his talent for drawing was early recognised by the Head Master. Through the good offices of Lord Milton, one of the Governors of the School, he was sent to London in 1760 as a pupil of Sir Joshua Reynolds, and became a student at that "nursery of so many English painters," St. Martin's Lane Academy. He made rapid strides under the tuition of his master and few, if any, of Reynolds' pupils ever attained to greater eminence or had a larger share of the master's affection. His pupilage could not have exceeded two years for in 1762 he painted portraits of the Okeden family, well known in polite society in the County of Dorset.

From London, Beach went to Bath and there established himself. The habitués of the western spa included the most influential in the land, and portrait painters flourished in a rich and fertile soil. In the words of the authoress: "At that time, beautiful Bath, Queen of the West, was at the zenith of her popularity. Beau Nash had faded out, after devoting a greater part of a strenuous life to the work of raising her from semi-obscurity to the rank of the most attractive provincial town in England. Thither flocked, not only those in search of health,

but all the fashionable world in pursuit of pleasure." In such a setting Thomas Beach enjoyed a fair share of the largesse so ostentatiously distributed. In his diary for 1796, which is in the possession of his descendants, there is an intimate and interesting picture of his life in the city, and from this we learn something of his association with prominent folk when he was not engaged in the more serious labour of his livelihood. Dorset and Somerset were the fields from which he mainly drew his sitters, although in some years he cast a wider net, coming into Oxfordshire and other counties.

His output was large and Miss Beach has been at considerable pains to track down and give a list of over three hundred of his known portraits with details, as far as possible, of their social connections, present whereabouts, and prices at the great auction rooms, where they have been sold. While the sums obtained for his works in recent times cannot of course be compared with those of his great contemporaries such as Gainsborough, Reynolds and Romney, there is evidence that whenever they have appeared they have evoked a lively interest and substantial bidding. In his day he was highly esteemed, both by his fellow artists, and the society in which he moved. We learn that his works were strongly and solidly painted, with the masses of light and shade well balanced ; the charm of distance being dexterously given and the treatment of the features broad and free. Many of his paintings bear no signature—a practice common in his day—but apart from those which have been mistaken for the work of greater masters little difficulty has been experienced in identifying the larger part of his output.

Among the more noted of his works are the following : George, Prince of Wales ; the Officers of the Dorset Yeomanry, including Capt. Tregonwell, the " founder " of modern Bournemouth, Lord William Craven and the Lady Craven, the Duchess of Devonshire, Thomas Dunkerley, the distinguished Freemason, Dr. Henry Harington of Bath, the Earl of Effingham, the Earl of Ilchester, Lady Anne de la Pole, Mrs. Siddons, the Stapleton family of Fawley Court, Henley, and many less notable folk. Thomas Beach died in 1806, and lies buried in the churchyard of

All Saints' Church, Dorchester. In 1905, a memorial brass to his memory was placed in the south aisle of that church by the members of his family and admirers of his art.

There is evidence of careful study and wide research in this interesting volume, and the authoress has delved deeply into the byways of that glamorous era of the 18th century which, for social elegance and artistic craftsmanship, will always remain the most completely satisfying of any period of English history. We congratulate Miss Beach upon her work, the more so as she is a member of the Berkshire Archaeological Society.

E.W.D.

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RIDES AND RAMBLES AROUND READING, No. 4. By H. T. MORLEY, F.R.Hist.S., F.S.A. (Scot.).

Our able Hon. Secretary has issued his fourth brochure under the above title. The district covered is as follows :—Sandford, Hurst, Wokingham, Easthampstead, Sandhurst, Yateley, Finchampstead, Barkham and Arborfield, a tract of very pleasant and diversified country interesting alike to the archæologist and the more general lover of rural England. In this "Ramble" there is something of interest to the student of every period, although the nature and purpose of these handy Guides preclude a lengthy notice of the more important historical incident with which the neighbourhood is concerned. I wonder whether I might break a lance with Mr. Morley upon one or two questions, without in any way wishing to discount the value and extreme usefulness of his efforts? The information in all guide books is very largely culled from the already published observations of earlier workers in the same field. One of the difficult problems awaiting all later writers on antiquarian subjects is to verify the statements made in such published works and one frequently finds it necessary to upset preconceived ideas which have been considered good archæological currency for a long time. Such a case occurred some months ago, when the fragmentary stained glass removed from the old Church at Arborfield, which had

been without question accepted as early Flemish by almost all who had written on this interesting ruin, was found to be the work of a Reading glass-stainer of the 18th century named John Rowell. Now Mr. Morley, although he has corrected the initial error of its origin, ascribes the glass to John Powell. This slip, unimportant though it may seem, contains, curiously enough, the seeds of a larger reverberation, for the Powell family have been glass makers at Whitefriars, London, for several centuries, and the layman might very easily accept so apparently obvious an association without further enquiry.

In dealing with Arborfield as a place-name, Mr. Morley says : " The name Arborfield is comparatively modern, and hardly older than the 15th century . . . is derived from ' herbarium, a herb-garden.' But the spelling of almost every place-name has undergone a change in five hundred years and as '*Erburgefeld*,' the place was known in the early part of the 13th century ; and while in common with a number of manors in the great ecclesiastical lordship of Sonning, it is not mentioned in Domesday Book, there is every reason to suppose it was an early settlement in a clearing in the great forest of eastern Berkshire. Its name is now generally accepted as having been derived from the OE. personal name Hereburh, who may conceivably have been a woman holding land in the pre-Conquest period.

Illustration 113 on page 110 should be 112. There are several unimportant slips in proof checking which need attention if these interesting and handy brochures be re-issued.

E.W.D.