

Notes and Reviews.

MEDIEVAL CHURCH PLATE IN BERKSHIRE.

In the current number of the *Archaeological Journal* [Vol. XCVI, Part I (1939), 159-177] Mr. C. C. Oman has published a complete catalogue of the medieval church plate of England and Wales. In this list, Berkshire figures with three pieces, all patens, from the churches of West Challow (dated as c. 1475-1500), Midgham (Hall-marked 1531) and Wootton (c. 1500-1540). The Garford paten Mr. Oman considers to be either a plain medieval example engraved in the XVIII century, or entirely of XVIII century workmanship. The paucity of examples in the county is in accord with the majority of other counties, Wiltshire standing apart with its very high total of five chalices and seven patens of pre-Reformation date.

NOTES ON ARCHAEOLOGICAL TECHNIQUE. Oxford University Archaeological Society, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford. N.d. [1940]. Price 9d.

The University Archaeological Society is to be congratulated on producing this pamphlet, which should be obtained and studied by anyone who is interested in excavation or is likely to be actually working as an assistant on an excavated site. And since in these days of constant and vigorous attacks upon the soil of England for every reason of exploitation and defence from within, and of destruction from without, the least likely of us may be unexpectedly called upon to undertake archaeological rescue work, this booklet should be an admirable stand-by for those who have had no experience in excavation but who are anxious to make the best of a puzzling job.

The notes cover the whole progress of an excavation and also give useful information of the preservation of objects found: while the whole production is excellent, a few criticisms and alternative suggestions may however be given here, though they are in no way intended to belittle the value of the pamphlet as it stands.

In the sequence adopted, surveying and planning are discussed after the sections dealing with the laying-out of cuttings and the methods of recording finds. But it is a very great advantage to lay out a permanent base line, accurately measured and orientated, or a series of fixed points (say as a grid of 10 or 20 foot squares) before any digging is begun. It is then not only possible to plot the excavations made, with considerable accuracy and speed, by triangulation from the fixed points (each of which forms a sub-base), but cuttings can be plotted on paper and then laid out on the ground by appropriate measurement. Such a method enables

one to have a constantly growing plan before one in the field, and when following up features by a series of trenches the disposition of these can be better decided by reference to and measurement on the plan than by eye on the ground. It should be emphasised that it is a very bad principle to delay planning until the excavation is at advanced stage—the plan should progress side-by-side with the digging, and no new cutting should be opened until all previously revealed features have been plotted in. The notes urge that “all trenches and other excavated areas in which anything of archaeological interest has been discovered” should be planned, but cuttings which reveal nothing are equally important as negative evidence, and everything should be recorded. And another point—inches and tenths are preferable to twelfths as a scale, and it must be remembered that the surveyor’s staff is marked in feet and tenths of a foot and unless a similar scale is used for horizontal measurements, adjustments must be made between the vertical and horizontal scales in sections and contouring. The adoption of the metric system would be the ideal, but national prejudice is hard to overcome.

In the actual excavation, on p. 6 it is as well to add “direction of prevailing wind” as an added determinant in placing dumps—throwing dry soil into a wind is a highly unpleasant as well as a rather profitless performance. On p. 16 it might be suggested that, if much pottery is to be mended, it is cheaper and more convenient to make one’s own *Durofix* by dissolving scraps of celluloid in acetone or amyl acetate. Such a solution can be made of any strength required, and a weak solution is very useful as a hardening medium for crumbling objects, though it should be remembered that a celluloid-acetone solution turns opaque white when in contact with moisture, and unless the objects are really dry the amyl acetate solvent must be employed.

On p. 19, dealing with the excavation of pits so as to leave a vertical section, it would be worth while mentioning that in the case of intersecting pits a continuous section of the filling should be left along the long axis of both to establish the relationship of one to another. And while on the subject of sections, the value of horizontal sections of soil, obtained by carefully scraping over the excavated area, is seldom stressed in English excavations and is not mentioned here. This technique can often be immensely informative, and in combination with the normal vertical sections can give a real three-dimensional record.

COUNTY HALL, ABINGDON. THE ARMORIAL WINDOWS. The Corporation of Abingdon. 1939.

When in the summer of 1644, the Royalist commander, Lord Wilmot, abandoned the town of Abingdon, the Parliamentary Captain-General Essex put the ruthless General Waller in charge.

The latter destroyed the Cross on the Bury and despoiled the churches, including that of St. Nicholas. This church remained with colourless windows until William Smith, Usher of Roysse's School from 1793 to 1844 and sinecure rector of St. Nicholas, inserted heraldic glass panels to replace that destroyed in 1644. In 1881, during a restoration of the church, this armorial glass consisting of perhaps more than forty shields was removed and became scattered in various directions; only twenty survived and have now been inserted in the windows of the County Hall in Abingdon. The glazing has been carried out by Mr. George Nutt of Oxford under the supervision of the Mayor (Councillor A. M. Wilson-Green), Mr. E. A. Greening Lamborn and Alderman A. E. Preston. This excellent pamphlet, issued by the Corporation, describes in detail the history and heraldry of the shields and gives biographical notes of the persons represented, all of which had some connexion with the town or neighbourhood. A photograph of the east window of the church, shewing twenty of the shields in position before 1880, is reproduced as a frontispiece. All concerned are to be congratulated on the preservation of this glass and it is to be hoped that the work will receive the attention it rightly deserves.