

THE SURREY RECORD SOCIETY, 1913-1954

BY

E. M. DANCE, PH.D.

Honorary Secretary, Surrey Record Society

A MAN'S biography would surely be incomplete if it made no mention of his children; similarly the life-story of the Surrey Archæological Society can hardly fail to take account of its offspring, the Surrey Record Society, which came into existence in 1913, when the parent Society was already fifty-nine years old.

From the start the Archæological Society had intended that records should be among its objects of study, although they did not take a high place among them. In fact, they come last on a list which begins with Prehistoric Antiquities and includes Heraldry, Costume and Numismatics. Nevertheless, in the first half of the Society's life, records were by no means neglected. Nearly every volume of the first twenty issued by the Society contained an article based on original records and/or giving transcripts or extracts from them. Mr. A. R. Bax, for example, published a number of articles on religious issues in 17th century Surrey, and another on the Parish Records of Ockley, with copious illustrations from the actual text. Many individual documents of great interest were thus brought to light, *e.g.*, a Muster Roll of 1627 relating to Surrey in the British Museum (Vol. X) and a Merstham Manorial Rental of 1522 (Vol. XX), while Mr. F. A. Crisp published a long series of Surrey Wills from the Prerogative Court of Canterbury records at Somerset House. In addition, the Society sponsored a complete volume of record publications, namely the *Feet of Fines*, covering the period from John to Henry VII, and following the usual pattern of such publications.

As has been related elsewhere, the real impetus to the Society's interest in records came after the removal to Guildford in 1898, and it was during the years before the first World War that it became increasingly obvious that the cause of Surrey

records could not be adequately served through the medium of the Surrey Archæological Society alone. The Honorary Secretary at this time, Mr. M. S. Giuseppi, and his colleague and successor in office, Mr. (now Sir) Hilary Jenkinson, were both on the staff of the Public Record Office and hence peculiarly able to appreciate both the deficiencies of the past and the needs of the future. What was required, from every point of view, was not the occasional printing of relatively short documents selected for their exceptional interest, sometimes incorporated in articles, but for the objective reproduction of complete and often lengthy documents, accompanied by introductions, explanatory notes and indexes. This would have several results; it would make the material printed immediately available for use by historians and archæologists, would arouse a more widespread interest in Surrey Records generally and in their preservation, and provide a key to the understanding of records similar in form remaining unprinted.

These considerations prompted a general appeal, in which the moving spirits were Mr. Giuseppi and Mr. Jenkinson, for support in the formation of a new society to be known as the Surrey Record Society. The appeal was issued in November 1912 under the signatures of Lord Farrer, Sir Frederick Pollock, Chairman of the Royal Commission on Public Records, Mr. R. A. Roberts (Secretary of the Public Record Office), Mr. H. E. Malden (Editor of the Victoria County History of Surrey), Mr. Ralph Nevill (for the Surrey Archæological Society), Mr. Giuseppi and Mr. Jenkinson. The reasons for calling a new society into existence were given with a preliminary list of nearly seventy potential subscribers and a *Short List of Documents Proposed for Publication*. This appeal was very well received, and the Foundation Meeting of the Surrey Record Society was held at Burlington House on April 15, 1913. The first officers and council were elected and a set of rules was approved, which made it quite clear that the new society was to be a publishing body only—a record-printing branch of the Archæological Society—whose activities would be ancillary to those of the elder body without in any way entering into social competition with it.

Thus launched, the Surrey Record Society started life with the promising number of 140 members (fifteen of them libraries), £70 in the bank derived from a ten-shilling entrance

fee, and an initial annual income of £70, from the ten-shilling subscription. Even more promising was the standing of the first officers and council—a promise which has been in every way fulfilled. One of the most striking features of the Society's leadership has been the long tenure of its offices and the connexion of so many of their holders with the Public Record Office. It is perhaps natural that men whose professional duties are in a London Government Office should very often live in or have other connexions with Surrey. More important, however, is the tradition begun when Mr. Giuseppi took over the Secretaryship of the Surrey Archaeological Society in 1897, thus unwittingly starting a movement which led to the foundation of an independent Record Society and the recruitment of its officers from the staff of the Public Record Office.

Of the original signatories to the appeal, one, Sir Hilary Jenkinson, is still actively guiding the Society's policies, having been elected President in 1950. After being one of the prime movers in its foundation he became the Society's first Secretary and then succeeded Mr. Giuseppi as editor in 1924, and it is to him, in these various capacities, more than to any other single person, that the Society is indebted for what it has achieved in its forty-one years.

The Society has been singularly fortunate in its Presidents; Sir Hilary's predecessors (there have been only three) were all men of outstanding ability. Lord Farrer, the first President, held office from 1913 until his death in 1940; he was a landowner of the old style, to whom support of local societies was as natural as public service for the County, and in addition he had a real interest in records, especially those bearing on Family and Parish history. His successor, Lord Onslow, was a man of similar stamp, with a long family connexion with the County, if not perhaps so great a practical interest in records. When bad health compelled him to relinquish the Presidency after only two years service, the Society was fortunate in finding to take his place Sir Frederic Kenyon, then also President of the Archaeological Society. The Record Society benefited from his wide scholarship and his experience of publication.

There have been only three Honorary Editors, on whose shoulders falls, naturally, the brunt of the work of the Society. For ten years Mr. Giuseppi discharged this office; then for over twenty-five it was in the hands of Mr. Jenkinson, who, on

becoming President, relinquished it to his colleague at the Public Record Office, Mr. L. C. Hector.

Under this guidance, the Society has produced a remarkable series of publications, mainly, of course, the responsibility of the successive Honorary Editors, who have sometimes themselves done the actual editorial work on the texts. Scholars of already acknowledged distinction have made contributions to the series of editions; while others have founded their reputations on the work they have done for the Society.

In order to give its members an immediate return for their subscriptions, the Society first entered into an agreement with the Canterbury and York Society to supply copies of its edition of the late 13th century Register of John de Pontissara, Bishop of Winchester, much of which is of course of great Surrey interest; it was issued in nine parts between 1913 and 1923. The remaining publications form a body of original work of inestimable value to Surrey historians, with a reputation extending far beyond the bounds of the county and indeed of the country.

The texts have all been based on principles enunciated and published in 1914, before any actual printed matter had appeared, and the Society's *Rules for the Transcription of Documents* have been accepted as a model in a wider sphere. The volumes produced have to some extent followed the conventional type for County Record Societies: *Musters*, *Mediæval Taxation Returns*, *Apprenticeships*, *Wills*, *Hearth-Tax Returns*, *Fines* and *Churchwardens' Accounts* all find parallels elsewhere. The consistently high standard of editing gives them, however, a peculiar value, and in many cases the elaborate and exhaustive Introductions have turned a publication of records relating to Surrey into a standard work on a specialized subject. It is only necessary to instance Professor Willard's edition of the *Taxation Returns*, Mr. C. S. Drew's volumes of *Lambeth Churchwardens' Accounts*, or Mr. C. A. F. Meekings' books of *Hearth-Tax Returns* and *Fines*. By no means all the original suggestions have yet been carried out: volumes dealing with early Surrey Assize Rolls, Surrey items from the Plea Rolls and Surrey Deeds, for example, have still to appear.

In other cases the Society has broken new ground, most notably in the edition of the *Surrey Pipe Roll, 1295*, in which the editor, Miss M. H. Mills, has made an outstanding contribu-

tion towards the study of mediæval finance. Another volume in which the Society has given a lead is that of the *Surrey Manorial Accounts*. The greatest single task undertaken by the Society, the publication *in toto* of the enormous 15th century Cartulary of Chertsey Abbey in the records of the Exchequer, is again something new of its kind. Three parts have already appeared, the first published in 1915, and the fourth and concluding part is envisaged for 1955. Many people have been engaged upon it, especially on the first part, but it is particularly associated with the name of Mr. Giuseppi, who was responsible for it in the first place as Honorary Editor, and did nearly all the work on the later parts himself. The notes for the final section were finished not long before his death in 1953, at the age of nearly eighty-four. When completed, the whole work will form a fitting memorial of one who served the cause of Surrey Records over a period of more than fifty years.

On the list of suggested publications in 1912 stood a proposal for a *General Survey of Records (Locally Preserved) of County and Borough Administration*. This was an entirely new idea in county record publication and was eventually inaugurated in 1926 by a General Introduction laying down principles of universal application in this, until then, little-explored field. This was followed by a series of *Guides*, describing in some detail the extant documents in each of six classes, documents in the Public Record Office relating to Surrey, Quarter Sessions records, records of Parishes, Boroughs, Manors, and Endowed Institutions, with information as to their whereabouts and accessibility. The publication of these *Guides* was made possible by the enlightened co-operation of the Surrey County Council, which footed the printers' bill and also enabled much of the information to be collected. It is no disparagement of these *Guides*, published between 1926 and 1931, to say that some of them will now be found to be out of date. Custody changes, and new records come to light (often as a result of the interest aroused by the publication). The value of this, as of all pioneer work, lies not so much in the original completed product, as in the fact that it causes further work to be done, with the inevitable result that it is itself superseded.

Such is the record of the Society's work, and of the guidance under which it has been achieved. The support it has received in the county as a whole has been, however, remarkably meagre.

The original membership of 140 was indeed quite encouraging, and when it rose to 156 in 1914 it must have seemed a good omen for the future. This figure was, in fact, the highest ever reached; the effect of the first World War, as also of the second, was a spectacular slump in membership, and between the wars the total never rose above 134, in 1928. A curious feature of the statistics is the consistent increase in the number of Institutional Members (or Libraries as they were at first called). In 1913 there were fifteen; now there are eighty-one, but only twenty-six of them are in the county, and many of the rest are American or other foreign libraries. Truly, "a prophet is not without honour, save in his own country." The individual membership has fluctuated considerably; at one time, in 1941, the nadir of the Society's fortunes, it was only thirty-eight; even today it has not risen above fifty-two.

This small membership has naturally had a serious effect on the Society finances. Even after the subscription was raised to £1 a year, in 1921, the annual income was never higher than £134, and often considerably less. The first President, Lord Farrer, made several very generous gifts to the Society, and mention has already been made of the great help received from the Surrey County Council. Lambeth Borough Council too assisted the Society by subsidising the publication of the *Lambeth Churchwardens' Accounts*, and the local authorities of Kingston and Twickenham are contributing to the cost of a forthcoming volume. Valuable as it is, such support cannot replace the life and growth provided by an enthusiastic body of private members. There is work in plenty to be done, and the Society is assured of competent editors to do it; its main pre-occupation for the future, at least for the immediate future, must be to obtain sufficient support to enable the publication to be continued, and if possible increased, beyond the very limited annual amount possible at present.