

## JOHN STOW COMMEMORATION SERVICE.

THE Annual Service at St. Andrew's Undershaft, took place on Monday, 27th April, 1931, when the Lord Mayor (Sir Phéné Neal) and the Sheriffs attended in State. The service was conducted by Bishop Perrin, D.D., and the singing was led by the choir of the Baltic Exchange.

The customary address on the life and work of John Stow was given by the new President of the London and Middlesex Archæological Society, Sir Montagu Sharpe, K.C., D.L.

For some time past it has been the laudable custom for a member of the London and Middlesex Archæological Society, of which the Lord Mayor is a Patron, to deliver a short address on the occasion of the Commemoration Service, held annually in this Church, in honour of that famous citizen, John Stow, the great historian and chronicler of the great City of London.

Among the many ceremonies in which our Lord Mayor takes part, surely there is none more touching than when he comes in State with his Sheriffs and Officers to pay tribute to the memory of John Stow.

Such extensive research has been made into the life and works of this citizen, that little or nothing can now be added to what is already known about him. On the other hand it is only right and proper that his memory should be kept fresh in the minds of each succeeding generation of the men of London, even if it be only by a brief recital of his life, and what he accomplished, followed by the picturesque ceremony which his Lordship will shortly perform.

John Stow was born in 1525 in the parish of St. Michael's, Cornhill, and during his early life followed

the trade of a tailor, so that in November, 1547, he was admitted to the freedom of the Merchant Taylors' Company. But his heart was rather in antiquarian pursuits, and in recording events both past and present, and having acquired some knowledge of Latin and French, he abandoned the needle and thread in 1556.

Stow lived in the reigns of five sovereigns, and during a momentous period in English history, when the great religious reformation and suppression of monastic houses took place, of these 13 were situated in London. Owing to the wreck of these institutions, many old-time chronicles, deeds, and parchment writings, which would now be of great value to the historian were lost or destroyed. Some of these documents Stow doubtless secured, being an ardent collector of legal and literary miscellanies, charters and ancient MSS., on which he is said to have spent annually £200 in furnishing his library. Though such expenditure pecuniarily embarrassed him, he pursued his researches for the general good of his age, as well as of posterity. So well was Stow's collection of papers known, that in 1569 his house was searched for treasonable letters, only to be found full of MSS. and books of learning and religion.

An edition of Chaucer, his first essay, was published in 1561, to be followed in 1580 by his *Annals and Summaries of English History*, this work has gone through eleven editions, alone self-evident testimony of the valuable work produced by the unsparing energy of this painstaking man. But Stow had to devote 18 long years of diligent research into London's past, besides setting down many of the changes that he had witnessed in that mediæval city, before he was able to issue *The Survey of London and Westminster*, his *Magnum Opus*, a mine of descriptive information published in Black Letter in 1598.

The secret of his success was that his heart was set in his work, and thus he established his reputation as the great historian of the city of London.

Stow revised a second edition of his survey two years before his death in 1605, and, as it has been said here, "if he were with us to-day he would have rejoiced to know that his work has endured, and that after the lapse of three centuries, the Lord Mayor and the Sheriffs come to this, his Church, to do him honour."

Again, if from St. Paul's he sought to trace his well-known city with fields and lanes and open countryside close at hand, what would he say when he gazed upon that vast expanse of buildings now stretching for many a mile into Middlesex formerly covered with smiling woods and pasture land, alas prophetically described in King Alfred's time as the land which pertained to London, as indeed it was, though in a different sense.

John Stow seems to have been a man of lively temperament, and his society was sought by men of letters, such as Camden and Archbishop Parker, his friend and patron. He probably was acquainted with Bacon and with Shakespeare in London, and was known to other eminent men.

Stow is described in an edition of his *Annals*, published shortly after his death, as tall of stature, lean in body and face, but with a pleasant and cheerful countenance, a sober man, courteous to all, and retaining his senses unto the day of his death.

After the publication of his *Survey* he seems to have had some leisure, for he was a collector of the money to furnish the Government with 4000 armed men.

Surely the example of Stow's life, and what he patiently accomplished, is an incentive to everyone who seeks to add to our knowledge of London with its immediate surrounding districts from early times down to the present, but ever-changing age, such work will now be rendered somewhat easier, for under recent legislation the valuable records of the ancient Manors of England are being collected, housed and made available for research and study. This should stimulate the zeal

of those who aspire to follow in the footsteps of the great John Stow, and to make full use, as he would have done, of these Manorial documents relating to Greater London. They can be made use of, for all historical purposes, so closely do they touch and concern the life of the people who dwelt therein.

John Stow died in April, 1605, and the monument to him in this Church was erected by his wife, Elizabeth, with the appropriate inscription: "To collect what should be recorded, and to write down what should be read."

In conclusion, I think that Bacon in his *Advancement of Learning*, published in 1605, must have had the historian Stow in his mind when he wrote:

"Antiquities or remnants of History are like the planks of a shipwreck, when industrious persons by an exact and scrupulous diligence and observation, out of monuments, names, words, proverbs traditions, private records and evidence, fragments of stories, passages and the like, do save and recover somewhat from the deluge of time."