

THE NEW PRESIDENT OF THE LONDON AND MIDDLESEX ARCHÆOLOGICAL SOCIETY

WE welcome as our President, in succession to the late Sir Montagu Sharp, the Rt. Hon. the Earl of Strafford, A.M.I.C.E., D.L., J.P., of Wrotham Park, South Mymms, Middlesex, the head of a most distinguished family, with long associations with our county. The Earl of Strafford is the sixth of that title, and was educated at Eton and abroad. He had experience as a civil engineer, and on the London Stock Exchange, of which he was a member for thirty years. For many years he has been active in the public life of Middlesex and Hertfordshire, being a Justice of the Peace for both counties, which is most appropriate, seeing that his seat is almost exactly on the border line that divides them. He has been a County Alderman for both counties, and for several years after the last war he was Chairman of the Finance Committee of the Middlesex C.C. He and his Countess have always been interested in the historical associations of the neighbourhood, and when the Barnet Record Society established a museum in Wood Street, where the excavated pottery from Sulloniacae is now stored, it was the Countess of Strafford who performed the opening ceremony.

The Earl has been one of our members for some time and very kindly invited our Society to visit his seat during the summer of 1943, a privilege which was very much appreciated. Wrotham Park is one of the few large estates left in Middlesex, and it occupies some 250 acres of ground in the fork of two roads, one passing north-westwards towards St. Albans, the other north to Hatfield. The old mansion was built in 1754 from the designs of Isaac Ware, a distinguished architect who studied in Italy, and was near forty years clerk of works in the Government service. It was built for Admiral John Byng whose fate, three years later, provoked one of Voltaire's wittiest epigrams.

The name Wrotham was given by the Admiral to the house for sentimental reasons, after the family property in Kent, which his grandfather had sold. It was "Kentish Sir Byng," as we gather from Robert Browning's cavalier song, who supported Charles I in the Civil War. Wrotham Park mansion bore a strong resemblance to Southill in Bedfordshire, another seat of the Byng family. The principal front, which, as so often

occurs, is at the back, faces westwards, with splendid views, still unspoilt, across the park towards Elstree and Watford. It was a red brick structure, but was covered with stucco in the nineteenth century; slightly enlarged in 1854 and back burnt in 1883.

It was able to be restored as the walls stood firm, and is to-day very much as it was before the disaster. As designed by Isaac Ware it "consisted of a spacious centre, with side colonnades, terminating in octagonal wings; with a deeply-recessed tetra-style portico, and a pediment extending along the second storey; the whole surmounted by a handsome balustrade."

The principal contents and pictures were saved undamaged, and there are a number of interesting Old Masters, in addition to portraits of the many famous members of the Byng family.

There is an old legend that the mansion narrowly escaped destruction by fire at the hands of the mob during the riots which followed the very unfair trial of Admiral Byng. On his death the property passed to his nephew, George Byng, whose eldest son was M.P. for Middlesex for nearly fifty years and died in 1847.

Wrotham Park passed on his death to his brother, Sir John Byng, a very distinguished soldier in the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. He saw service in Flanders and was probably at the siege of Borke, where died the original Thomas Atkins, whose name Wellington chose as the typical English soldier. Byng was in the disastrous expedition in 1809 to Walcheren, an interesting earlier landing on a semi-hostile shore in Europe; he commanded a *brigade in the Peninsula and at Waterloo*; and was Commander-in-Chief in Ireland from 1828 to 1831. He was created Baron Strafford in 1835 and Earl of Strafford in 1847. Five years before his death in 1860 he was made a Field Marshal.

A later member of the family who won very high distinction in the first World War was F.M. Sir Julian Byng, later Viscount Byng of Vimy, who upheld the family traditions during many years' service on the Western Front.

Our Society is very proud to have established so vital a link with one of the most historic families in the county.