

A BRIEF NOTICE OF THE WORK THE SOCIETY HAS ACCOMPLISHED DURING THE FIFTY YEARS OF ITS EXISTENCE,

being a Paper read at the Jubilee Meeting of the Society by  
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I HAVE been asked to prepare a short paper in connection with the Jubilee of this Society, giving some account of the work which it has accomplished during the 50 years of its existence. I possess no special qualifications for this task. I am not one of the oldest members of the Society,—for I joined it, I think, only about 1875; but having edited its publications for some sixteen years, after the death of Mr. Thomas North, in February, 1884, I was during that time able to see some of the good work which it accomplished.

The Society was established on 10th January, 1855. It owes its origin to the labours of two or three distinguished archæologists now passed away, chief amongst whom was the Rev. J. M. Gresley. Of the patrons, presidents, and committee appointed at the first meeting, the venerable Mr. Thomas Ingram, who for the first twelve months served the office of Hon. Secretary, alone now survives. Of the first members appointed at that meeting, the Financial Secretary (Colonel Bellairs), whom we are delighted to see with us to-day, is the only one now living. The present Duke of Rutland (then Lord John Manners), was elected a President of the Society during the first year. Many of us will remember the late Duke of Rutland, Sir Frederick Fowke, Sir Arthur Grey Hazlerigg, and Mr. Wm. Perry-Herrick, who were all officers of the Society from its commencement, all of whom have passed away.

In looking back over the work of the Society, the first thing that naturally occurs to us is *the long list of distinguished antiquaries*, many of whom have long since passed away, some of them of world-wide fame, who were connected with the Society. Such names as the Rev. John Morewood Gresley, James Thompson (whose "History of Leicester" has never been surpassed by any historian of any other town), Thomas North (whose numerous books on bells have made his name a household word amongst campanologists, and whose book on St. Martin's Church has constantly been referred to in Ecclesiastical suits), Wm. Napier Reeve (a most learned historian), William Kelly (the author of "Royal Progresses"), the Rev. John Harwood Hill (author of the "Gartree Hundred"), the Rev. Andrew Trollope (who has left us the best book on Church Plate that has yet seen the light), Thomas Rossall Potter (the historian of Charnwood), will occur to

us at once. Of our Leicestershire antiquaries, Hill, North, Potter, Thompson were considered by the Editors of the "Dictionary of National Biography," to be worthy of more than local honour, and biographies of them are printed in that great Dictionary. All these distinguished antiquaries have left us, in the nine volumes of our own *Transactions* and in the twenty-seven volumes of the *Associated Societies' Reports and Papers*, a vast number of learned Papers, dealing with the archæology of the County of Leicester and elsewhere.

Our own *Transactions*, though not so voluminous as those of some other Societies, yet contain a vast amount of very valuable material. The *Athenæum*, in reviewing one of our volumes, justly described it, as containing much good solid matter, without any padding. This is true of all our volumes.

*The objects of the Society* have always been, "to promote the study of ecclesiastical architecture, general antiquities, and the restoration of mutilated architectural remains within the county;" and the Society has always offered its help in "furnishing suggestions for improving the character of ecclesiastical edifices, and for preserving all ancient remains" which it considered of value and importance. And when its advice has been sought in the restoration of any church, it has ever been ready to appoint a sub-committee to visit the church and issue a report thereon.

The Society has always taken a very keen interest in promoting the study of *ecclesiastical architecture*, and the conservative restoration of the ancient churches of Leicestershire. Year after year its Reports have dealt with every case of Church building or restoration that has taken place in the County during the preceding twelve months, whilst all additions and gifts to the Churches have been recorded, even down to comparatively trivial moveable ornaments. So that in future any local historian, dealing with the history of any church, will find in the Reports all details ready to hand.

The advice of the Committee has constantly been sought by the Clergy and others engaged in restoring their Churches, and I venture to say to the very great gain of the parish. Even professional architects themselves are not always careful in preserving old work; they will sometimes destroy old work solely on utilitarian grounds. A case occurs to my mind in which, in a certain church, there were three or four of those beautiful deeply splayed semi-circular headed, narrow, Norman windows, in very good condition. The architect, to whom the restoration of the church was entrusted some 13 years ago, was not altogether pleased with the size of these windows, and drew out a set of plans, in which these narrow lancet windows were all to be swept

away and some large 19th century windows of his own devising inserted instead. Fortunately, however, owing to the presence of some antiquaries on a Diocesan Committee, to whom application had been made for a grant towards the restoration of the church, this architect's nefarious designs on these ancient windows were frustrated, and the windows are still present in the church. (This was *not* in Leicestershire.) Our own local Committee have always striven jealously to prevent the unnecessary destruction of old work.

Some 21 years ago, some internal work was being done at Lutterworth Church, a building of which all Leicestershire men are justly proud, on account of its association with Wyclif, who was appointed rector there by King Edward III. on 7th April, 1375. Our Society appointed a Sub-Committee to visit the Church, and to report on the work that was being done. The visit was duly made, and the Sub-Committee issued a detailed report, in which they expressed their opinion that the decorations that had been recently carried out on the chancel arch, and on the walls of the chancel and aisles and west end of the nave, was bad both in colouring and design, and utterly out of harmony with the building, and consequently incapable of assisting the devotional thoughts of the worshippers. And they made suggestions for a more fitting adornment of the walls of Lutterworth Church. The result was that the work of adornment was, temporarily at all events, suspended. I merely mention this as an instance of the way in which the Society has striven to protect historic monuments, and to prevent their defacement. It has exercised a wholesome influence in the formation of a correct taste as regards the public edifices of the county,—the churches and chapels, houses, and buildings of every kind; and it has helped to create in the minds of many a desire to carefully repair and restore the decayed ancient buildings of the county.

The Society has always kept a sedulous watch over such objects of antiquity as the Jewry Wall, the Roman Pavements and other relics of Roman Leicester, the Newarke Gateway, the Trinity Hospital, and the old buildings in that most delightful part of old Leicester, the remains of the Abbey, &c., &c., and it has striven to prevent the destruction of such buildings as these by railway companies and builders, who look at everything simply from a utilitarian point of view, and who are (as antiquaries know) sadly lacking in conscience.

It might be productive of good results if the Committee would issue a Circular (signed by the Patrons of the Society and the Chairman of Committee), setting forth the advantages accruing to a town which possesses ancient buildings, and the harm entailed to it by their destruction. If such a circular were drawn

up and printed, and distributed amongst members of town and county councils, &c., it might have a good effect upon local authorities, in inducing them to use their influence to stop the wholesale destruction of our ancient buildings.

Most excellent work has been effected by the Society in *the long series of Papers*, which year by year have been issued in its *Transactions* and in the *Associated Societies' Volumes*. These papers have dealt with nearly every point of archæological and antiquarian research connected with the county. The future historian of any Leicestershire parish, or of any particular period in the history of the county taken as a whole, will find in these papers abundance of materials ready to hand.

I except, from this general statement, the Palæolithic and Neolithic ages. These have never yet been worked out in the Society's papers. An occasional find of a stone implement has now and then been recorded; but there has been as yet no systematic attempt made to trace the presence of Neolithic man in Leicestershire. There have been remarkably few workers in this field hitherto. One of the most delightful was the Rev. Selwyn C. Freer (a brother of Major Freer, our Hon. Secretary), but he is not now living in England; and what became of his finds I know not. They *ought* to find a resting place in our Leicester Museum!\* The number of specimens of flint implements located in the Museum is remarkably small, one of the poorest collections of local specimens that I have ever met with. Leicestershire is probably rich in the remains of Neolithic man; and possibly traces of Palæolithic man may be found here also. This field of research offers wide scope to the Leicestershire antiquary.

All known finds of the *Bronze Age* have been recorded in the *Transactions*; and papers have been written about the various British camps and barrows, and the Celtic place-names left us in the County, and the tribe of the Coritani who peopled it. With reference to Mr. Read's remarks about the opening of barrows,† I think there has as yet been very little, if any, systematic opening of our Leicestershire barrows.

The *Roman period* has elicited a number of willing workers; the papers are numerous and excellent. Foremost amongst the writers on this period is our venerable Hon. Secretary, Colonel Bellairs, who has made a special study of Roman Leicestershire, and whose contributions to our *Transactions* on this period are

\* Since this paper was read the Rev. Selwyn C. Freer has passed away in S. Africa. He presented his fine collection to the British Museum on leaving England.—ED.

† This refers to the preceding paper read by Mr. C. H. Read, F.S.A., on "The Old Museum and the New," published in *The Associated Papers for 1904*.

valuable and numerous. The Roman and British camps in the County have also been well dealt with by various writers. And the frequent discoveries of Roman pottery, coins, &c., &c., have all been duly recorded in the *Transactions*. No period has been so thoroughly worked out as the Roman occupation.

The discoveries from time to time of *Saxon remains*, as cemeteries, at Melton, Saxby and elsewhere, pottery, &c. have all been duly recorded. And the *Danish* influence on the County has been worked out in a paper by Mr. Thomas Carter.

The period succeeding the *Norman Conquest*, and the erection of Norman Castles and strongholds in the County, was a special study of Mr. James Thompson. Then we have that excellent Survey of Leicestershire in the reign of Henry I., preserved in the P.R.O., which shows the gradual change from Wapentakes to Hundreds. It was first brought to light by Mr. J. H. Round, but owing to the kindness of Mr. Justice Joyce, we have a photographic copy of the original in our *Transactions*. When we come to the *Mediæval* period, excellent papers have been written on the Battle of Bosworth, and on the foundation and growth of the *Abbeys and Priories*; and especially of the Abbey of Leicester, much documentary evidence has been collected, though it still remains for the practical ecclesiastical antiquary to excavate the site within the walls, and bring to light the exact position of the monastic buildings. The other monastic houses have not been so fully dealt with.

The period of the Civil War, in which this town and county took so long and so prominent a part, has been very fully worked out, particularly by Mr. James Thompson.

A great deal of matter relating to the ecclesiastical history of Leicestershire has been published, and also concerning old Leicestershire families. It has been very wide in the manner of subjects dealt with. Heraldry, and photography, ancient charters and wills, rare books, painted glass, coins, tradesmen's tokens, pavements, have all received attention.

We have begun to print some of the vast stores of unpublished documents which are preserved at the Public Record Office, British Museum, and at Lincoln. But very much more remains to be done in this direction. The Society would do well to follow the example of Staffordshire, Lancashire, Cheshire, Yorkshire, and other counties, and print in the *Transactions* more record matter. We are too apt to think that Nichols' bulky eight volumes contain all that is necessary for the topographical writer; but this is not so. Vast stores of documents have come to light since Nichols' day. His work is wonderful for the time in which he lived; but it is after all only a collection of materials.

And no place-history could be written to-day, with Nichols only to fall back upon.

The Society might be able to give a good deal of help in the preparation of the "*Victoria Counties History*" of Leicestershire, and so assist in producing a good up-to-date history of the County. And it might also help on the *Canterbury Society*, and expedite the printing of the Lincoln Episcopal Registers. Without some such help, it will be a vast number of years before many are published. I venture to throw out these suggestions.

In point of *numbers* there has always been a good complement of subscribing members. In its first year 96 members were enrolled; they now number more than 200. The cheapness of the subscription, and the issue of the yearly parts, have always helped to keep the numbers large. And the members generally have taken an interest in the Society's work. The Society has, I think, succeeded in grafting a love of the study of archæology in many of its members. And it has exercised a wide influence throughout the County in inducing the owners of ancient and historical remains to preserve them carefully. Whilst by its constant meetings, and careful record of the Antiquities exhibited at them, and by its wealth of papers printed in its *Transactions*, it has rendered their work easy to future historians of our Leicestershire towns and villages.

I have tried, though I have but very imperfectly succeeded, in giving you some account of the work accomplished by the Society during the fifty years of its existence. The Society has a great future before it, and a great work still remains for it to do.

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