

EXTENSION OF MUSEUM
AND
OPENING OF MUNIMENT ROOM

In the last number of the *Records* (vol. xii, p. 423), the scheme for carrying out these much-needed additions to the Society's premises was mentioned. Although the full sum required was not obtained sufficient donations were received from members and from the Bucks County Council to enable the work to be put in hand, and on 9th June, 1934, the Master of the Rolls declared the extension and muniment room open in the presence of the Lord Lieutenant, the High Sherriff, the Chairman of the County Council, and over 100 members of the Society.

The Chairman, Major CONINGSBY DISRAELI, in formally introducing Lord Hanworth, said that the Bucks Archæological Society was founded in 1847, he believed by the casual meeting together of a certain number of gentlemen in the Vestry of St. Mary's Church, Aylesbury; and the idea of founding an architectural and archæological society was made on that date. It was in "full go" in 1848. There was one very curious condition in the membership of that day—every member had to be in communion with the Church of England. That was rather strict, and the rule vanished after a bit; but it enabled them to-day to understand the very narrow lines upon which the Society first began. The Society was begun by certain of their wise Ecclesiastics in that part of the world, and had flourished ever since.

Then they had temporary rooms for the rather curious collection of things which they had then; and later on, as their collection grew and they had the opportunity, they purchased a part of the old Grammar School which formed the present museum. Later, again owing to the immense extension and enlargement of their collection of exhibits, and owing to the persistence with which they were pressed to take charge

of the documents of the county, they had to consider an extension. They considered it in many ways. They tried to get the rest of that building, but they did not get it, and so they had to make their extension down below, where the new muniment room had been constructed, in which they would be able to keep the documents which the Master of the Rolls had entrusted to their keeping, and of which the Society hoped to be the proper and satisfactory trustees.

They had overcome great difficulties in excavating within the narrow site of the Museum.

They had already there a number of the Manor Rolls of the county, and they had twelve to thirteen thousand old deeds relating to property in the county that really wanted and justified proper custody. They settled that extension at a meeting at Eton College last summer, when the chair was taken by their President.

They were not only a Society which simply kept open door for an idle person to come in ; they did a lot of work, and the County Council had recognised it by giving them an annual grant, as well as a very handsome sum towards the extension. Thousands and thousands of school children had been through that Museum and had listened to the kindly talks of their Curator (Mr. Hollis). Teachers and others preparing for examinations had come there and used their library, and—it might sound very curious—even young policemen had come there to see the classes of birds which it was unlawful for inhabitants of the county to kill. So they had done very useful work in certain ways. It had been wonderful to observe the intelligence which children had picked up and the exceptionally good examples of flint instruments brought in to the Museum by children who had seen flint instruments there and found other such instruments in their own localities.

LORD HANWORTH expressed the very great pleasure it gave him to take part in the opening of that muni-

ment room, in the building of which they had overcome so many serious difficulties. Another great pleasure to him was to find himself among a great number of friends—friends who helped him in the matter of the collection and the preservation of documents. He congratulated the Society and the County Council upon the success that they had made of what was a very difficult problem.

That movement for the collection and preservation of manorial records and county documents had met with a wide and generous response in all parts of England and Wales, and so he was delighted to be present that afternoon to open a well-equipped muniment room for the County of Buckingham, which had such an important place among other counties for the history attached to it, and its many sons. History, as they now knew it, endeavoured to trace the origin and development of the movements which from time to time came to a head and provided those dates which in their childhood they used to commit to memory. Everyone who read history was glad to have at the back of his memory the dates of the Kings and Queens of England, so that he might assign to their right periods the incidents which had an appealing interest and an instructive force for us to-day.

But one of the great values of history was to afford guidance both for the present and the future. It equipped them to understand and placed in their hands a touch-stone by which to test the proposals of to-day. "It is a habit of this country—a wise and salutary habit, which guards us from precipitate legislation—that a question should be fairly discussed and understood, not merely by Cabinets and Councils, but by the nation altogether, before we give it the final seal of permanent legislation." He was quoting from the wise words of the uncle of their Chairman that day, that writer and speaker whose words had survived the tests of his own generation and had been found to be meant for mankind.

They were able, with knowledge of the successes and

failures of the past to form a juster estimate of to-day and to-morrow than if they approached them without being equipped with that experience from the past which had called into being "that sublime instinct of an ancient people," to quote Disraeli once more.

He made no apology, therefore, for endeavouring to stimulate their interest and to quicken their zeal in the collection and preservation of those records and documents which might tell the story of how that sublime instinct was acquired and applied, and the story of how it overcame the difficulties that prevailed in times past, which were just as great—probably greater than any problems that they had to face to-day.

The Master of the Rolls proceeded to quote from documents of Bucks interest, and said that they would find, in their records up and down the country, an enormous amount of interest. There were those relating to the Civil War, a few of which had been brought to his attention. Among the State Papers of the reign of Charles I., preserved in the Public Record Office, was a series of letters from one Nehemiah Wharton, a sergeant in the army of the Earl of Essex, written in the summer and autumn of 1642 and detailing the early movements of that part of the Parliamentary forces which was formed by the volunteers of London. In those letters there were several references to Aylesbury, which was an important position in the outpost line covering London, and several also to John Hampden, including the following:—

"Saturday morninge our companies overtoke us and we marched together unto Alsbury, and after we had marched a longe mile, for so they are all in this countrey, wee came to Wendever, where wee refreshed ourselves, burnt the railes [in the church], and accidentally one of Captaine Francis his men, forgettinge he was charged with a bullet, shot a maide through the head and she immediately died. . . . From hence we marched very sadlye,

two miles, where Colonel Hamden, accompanied with many gentlemen well horsed, met us and with great joy saluted and welcomed us, and conducted us unto Alsbury, where we have a regiment of foote and severall troopes of horse to joyne with us. . . .

In this town a pulpit was built in the market place, where we heard two worthy sermons. . . . Every day our soildiers by stealth doe visit papists' houses, and constraine from them both meate and money. They gave them whole greate loaves and cheeses, which they triumphantly carry away upon the points of their swords. . . . Early in the morning I gathered a complete file of my owne men and marched to Sir Alexander Denton's parke [at Hillesden], who is a malignant fellow, and killed a fat buck, fastened his head upon my halbert and commaunded two of my pikes to bring the body after me to Buckingham. With part of it I feasted my captaine, Captain Parker. Captain Beacon and Colonell Hamden's sonne, and with the rest severall leiftenants, enseignes and serjeants, and had much thanks for my paines. This morninge our regiment, being drawne into the fielde to exercise, they demanded five shillings a man, which, they say, was promised them monthly by the Committee, or they would surrender their armes. Whereupon Colonell Hamden and other commanders laboured to appease them but could not; so that if they have not the forenamed supply, we feare a very great faction amongst us."

Very few sermons, even from a pulpit in the middle of a town, had had such a great effect of late years, and the struggle for wages was not an unknown problem in these days.

He then quoted from a letter written by Prynne to Sir Harbottle Grimstone regarding the national records, then kept in the Tower of London.

[Lord Hanworth did not mention, though he doubtless knew, that Sir Harbottle Grimstone, himself Master of the Rolls for twenty-three years,

married a Bucks lady, Mary, daughter of Sir George Croke, of Chilton.]

Such documents provided illustrations of what might be termed the human side of history, the human side of life, because when they were collecting documents they were not merely collecting something they might call an old document, to put away in a drawer. Happily, now, people were able to read and collate them, and derive the movement of which they were instinct, and show how there had been a development, and how in the past we had overcome many of the difficulties, similar difficulties to those that constrained us at the present time.

Describing the old copyhold system of land tenure, which was brought to an end in the year 1922 and successive sessions by the new laws of property introduced by the late Lord Birkenhead, and the rapid enfranchisement of such land, the Master of the Rolls observed that the period of years allowed for the enfranchisement of that land was now rapidly coming to an end. When that system of tenure had gone it was quite clear, he said, that no-one would want to refer to the Court Rolls or preserve the Court Rolls, and so it was that by a thoughtful amendment of the law, made in the House of Commons in 1924, provision was made for the Manorial documents to be placed under the charge and superintendence of the Master of the Rolls. That imposed a very considerable task upon him, but they were at once conscious of the reason why that imposition had been made upon him. They quite well knew that the Rolls of the Courts of the Manors contained a mass of history, small in itself, but at the same time valuable from the point of view of the social condition of the old days, of the financial position of those days and genealogical history, and from many other points of view of great importance. They got together a Committee, of which his friend, the Master Chandler was one, and they had worked away ever since ; and they had been successful in having either actually at the Record

Office, or at any rate a note at the Record Office, of some 20,000 Manors, and where, anyway, the documents relating to those Manors were. That meant that they had preserved, either in their own place, or at the Record Office, Manorial documents covering a long period of time, from the 12th and 13th centuries onwards.

They had had a number of meetings, in all the counties of England, for the purpose of safeguarding those documents. Their policy had always been—and he was very strong about it, himself—they did not want to disturb a single document from safe custody. He had to be satisfied that the place where they were to be stored was sufficient and suitable for the purpose, and that was how his jurisdiction came in, and how he had had the great pleasure of saying that Aylesbury, the County Town, was the right place for the documents which were not safely protected in other places. In that way one had been able to stimulate a patriotic zeal for the county. At the present time the system was working very well, and in all the county towns they had now large collections and an active archivist, or other person, taking care of the documents, gradually sorting them out, calendaring them, and making them valuable for the students of history.

History, after all, was one of the most interesting subjects that one could read about. It transported one into a new field. It was like foreign travel, and so it was that when one read of the early days of one's County Town, the early days of one's village, one was reading something which was of greater interest than fiction.

He congratulated them upon the work they had done already. He wanted to hearten them with regard to the work which they were doing at the present time, and he wanted also to encourage their zeal, already manifested, by which they would increasingly collate documents and preserve history of much manifold interest for those who came after them, to read

and to admire. (Applause).

LORD COTTESLOE, proposing a vote of thanks to the Master of the Rolls, remarked that he was the very humble custodian of the official records of the County of Buckingham, and he took a very great interest in the subject of the preservation of records. His own responsibility for the official county records was, he hoped, fairly well discharged by their preservation in the strong room at the County Hall, and there were many of them who knew that at that moment, under the County Council and the Standing Joint Committee, the sorting and calendaring of those papers had been for some time in progress. Then they had that other great class of documents, particularly those belonging to the Manors, which hitherto had been preserved in private hands. The difficulty about documents in private hands was that often they were in the hands of people who did not understand them, who could not read them, who perhaps did not appreciate the extraordinary interest of those ancient writings. There were a great many people who lived so entirely in the present that they really had not time to bother about the past, and he was quite sure that he was correct when he said that hitherto an enormous number of interesting old documents in private hands had—he would not say been deliberately destroyed—but had perished, because people did not know what to do with them. He knew very well—and he thought Mr. Hollis would be able to confirm what he said—that when people knew there was a place for the proper care and custody of such things they were very glad, in many cases, to hand them over, in order that they might be preserved, and that whatever was interesting in them might be available.

Of course, those things were not always appreciated. He looked into shop windows sometimes, where he saw articles of common use, like lampshades, which consisted of old parchment writings which had been cut up and used in that way, as it were for ornament. It was impossible to say that in any

particular instance there had perished a document of interest, but he thought that it showed the extremely unintelligent way in which some of the records which fell into private hands were dealt with.

The Bucks Archæological Society had passed through an existence of struggle, but it had never lacked the support of a number of enthusiasts in the county. Perhaps he might be allowed to congratulate those responsible for the management of the Society for the great work which they had done; in future times they would earn the gratitude of posterity. They were extremely grateful to Lord Hanworth for having come that day and for having set the seal on the work which had been done.

SIR LEONARD WEST seconded. He stated that his experience latterly had been that money had been rather more easy to get from the county authorities for work of that character and for the preservation of records than was so some years ago: and he felt sure that such ease was largely due to the interest in that work of preservation which Lord Hanworth had done so much to increase throughout the country.

LORD HANWORTH, in reply, emphasised how grateful they were to the Bucks County Council for what that authority had done. At a meeting of the Trustees of the British Museum that morning a man well versed in the ways of County Councils all over the country towards those matters informed him that Bucks was one of the County Councils which was good enough to take an interest and to help its Archæological Society financially.

Some facts regarding the construction have been contributed by Mr. Martyn, and are worth placing on record:—

The amount of excavation involved the wheeling of 5,000 barrow loads of earth out through the passage into the street and carting them away. In the course of the excavation, an old well, a quantity of human re-

mains, and an old cesspit were discovered, all within a few yards of each other. The old well proved a help to us, as it was not under any of the walls, and a quantity of earth was disposed of down its shaft instead of being wheeled through the passage. The skulls and other bones did not appear to represent actual burials, but were probably those of bodies that had been previously disturbed when the foundations of the old building were dug, and had been reburied in the yard. The old cesspit proved a difficulty, as a large reinforced concrete beam had to be constructed to carry one of the side walls over it. This, however, did not involve extra expense, as the foundations of the old building were deeper than we had expected, and enough "underpinning" was saved to pay for the extra concrete and reinforcement. $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles of steel rods of various sizes were used in the reinforcement of the concrete, and the roof over the new Muniment Room would safely carry a load of 20 tons.

The Muniment Room is 384 square feet in area and provides space for about 780 feet run of 15 in. steel shelving such as we are now putting in along one side. The surrounding passage provides 280 square feet of useful storage for things that are of minor importance.

If some day it becomes necessary to instal "rolling stacks" in the Muniment Room, its shelf space would be increased to 1,000 feet and the shelves now installed could go into the surrounding passage.

The Muniment Room is of solid reinforced concrete, with a waterproof layer of asphalte underneath. The door is fireproof and waterproof, so that if the passage were by any means to become flooded, water would not reach the Muniment Room till it rose to the height of the keyhole.

The extra exhibition space provided on the ground floor is about 550 square feet, and strange to say, gives rather less feet run of wall space than the old building, but the new wall space is higher and better lighted than the old.