

## The Proceedings of the Bucks Architectural and Archæological Society,

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### EXCURSION TO SILCHESTER.—ANNUAL MEETING.

THE annual excursion of the Bucks Archæological Society, as a natural consequence of its being a local organization, usually partakes of the character of a visit to some localities or edifices of antiquarian interest situated within the limits of the county; but this year a deviation was made from the accustomed plan of operations, and a famous spot in a neighbouring county was chosen as the locality to be examined. The innovation proved a highly successful venture, both as regards the number of members who joined the party—about sixty altogether—and the interest evinced in the object of the excursion, which was to pay a visit to the well-known site of Silchester—the ancient *Caer Segont* of the Britons, and *Calleva Atrebatum* of the Roman Itineraries. The members travelled by rail from their several stations in the district to Reading.

#### THE SILCHESTER MUSEUM.

A slight modification in the official programme was made, the visit to the Blagrove Street Museum taking place before going to Silchester, instead of after the return. The museum is as a rule closed on Thursdays, but an exception was made on this occasion so that the members of the Society might not lose the opportunity of seeing the interesting and important collection of antiquities from Silchester which it contains. In doing this the members had the efficient guidance of Mr. W. H. St. John Hope, assistant secretary to the Society of Antiquaries, who has made Roman antiquities in general, and those of Silchester in particular, his special objects of study. On one of the walls at the end of the museum near the entrance hung a large plan of Silchester, and with the aid of a long pointer, Mr. Hope was able to indicate to the visitors the direction of the outer ramparts, the Roman walls and gates, and explain the position and extent of the buildings which had been found in the portion of the city already excavated. He remarked in passing that in former times explorations were made chiefly for the purpose of discovering coins; but in the present day, while not undervaluing the important part which the discovery of coins played in the elucidation of the history of an historic spot, they did not lose sight of many other things which were of equal importance. He first referred to the remains of Keltic earthen ramparts, pointing out their extent and position. The Romans on making themselves masters of this country discovered in Silchester a convenient centre to which several roads converged, and so they settled there, and built on the site one of their regularly laid out and properly constructed cities. They formed a new

line of fortifications round the place, and the portions still remaining *in situ* indicated very distinctly which were of Keltic and which of Roman origin. The two, of course, differed very widely in the character of their construction, and can be easily distinguished. The Roman city was laid out with the streets running at right angles to each other, if we are to take Uriconium as an example. A similar rectangular arrangement of a town might be seen at Winchelsea in Sussex. The Silchester blocks of houses were not of uniform extent, some of them being much wider than others. In order to form a defence to the city, the Romans cut down the outer face of the Keltic work, and erected against it a wall 20 ft. high and 7 ft. thick, which was pierced by several gates, the four principal entrances being at the cardinal points—north, east, south, and west—and there were also subordinate gates at irregular intervals between those four; one on the south side led to the amphitheatre, which was outside the city walls. All other investigations into Roman works had been conducted either in connection with villas or camps, and were, therefore, confined to a small area. No systematic attempt had been hitherto made to work out a Roman town. There were a great many of them in this country. London was a Roman town, so were Colchester, Corinium (Cirencester), and others; but it was impossible to excavate such places as those. Uriconium, Verulamium, Woodchester, and Bignor had been excavated to some extent, but Silchester had enormous advantages over all of them in having no buildings on it, so that the whole site was open and available for exploration. The spot had been well-known to antiquaries for centuries, and ever since the time of Henry VIII. it has been regarded as one of great interest. Leland's account written at that period was very correct, and he refers to the peculiar appearance of corn growing on the lines of the old streets. He writes: "There is one strange thing seen there, that in certain parts of the ground within the walls the corn is marvellous fair to the eye, and, ready to perfecture, it decayeth." Some explorations were made during last century, but nothing of very great importance appears to have been done, and there is no record of any of the discoveries that were made.

In 1833 the Rev. J. G. Joyce, of Strathfieldsaye, commenced his researches among the remains of the city, but he appears to have interested himself chiefly in hunting for coins, and there can be little doubt that many valuable things were then lost. Silchester is not a limited area like that of a villa, but one of more than 100 acres in extent. Mr. Hope then pointed out on the plan the portion of the city which had been uncovered. The central portion of the site contained the Forum or Market-place, with shops situated round it, and the great Basilica or Town Hall. In some of the other squares were Temples, houses, and groups of shops. They had also unearthed a church, which Mr. Hope thought was older than any other Christian edifice in Europe. It was a very small building, only 40 ft. long, and was situated to the south-east of the Forum. The visitors should bear in mind that the houses and other buildings to which he had referred were represented by foundations only—there was seldom anything found above ground higher than a few inches. The Silchester houses were of two distinct types—Corridor houses and Court-Yard houses. One difference between these houses and the Roman villas which were found in various parts of the country was that they were destitute of baths, which was accounted for by assuming that there was a public bathing establishment within the city that had not yet been discovered. Some of the buildings were, doubtless, erected for industrial purposes in connection with the curious furnaces they had found—some completely perfect, others in ruins—which had large vats over them. Some were found in buildings, some in the open

air. These vats were used in connection with the dyeing works that existed throughout a large portion of the city. A number of large mills had also been discovered, and other places for grinding corn.

The museum in which the members were assembled, Mr. Hope explained, contained objects discovered at Silchester during the last eight years. At one end of the room was a collection of important architectural fragments, some of which had formed part of the fine Basilica, which was 270 ft. long, and had, perhaps, ten pillars on each side, with capitals similar to the one there exhibited. The room contained a collection of Roman remains such as could not be seen anywhere else in England. In their architecture the Romans used Purbeck marble, not the white variety of their own country. An interesting account was given of the manner in which the Romans constructed their wells. The sub-soil at Silchester was composed of sand and clay. They went down through the sand, and were obliged to line the wells in some way. This they did by sinking wooden barrels of fir, six feet high, which, while keeping out the sand, allowed the water to percolate through, so that they always had a plentiful supply of clear water. If the well was deeper than usual they placed two barrels in it, one on the top of the other. The specimens preserved were still quite sound, and two of them taken from a well could be seen in the museum. Everything found at Silchester was purely Roman; they never discovered anything either pre-Roman or post-Roman.

The visitors then, under the guidance of Mr. Hope, made a tour of the room, and inspected the various articles and fragments which had been discovered. In one of the cases was a hoard of 258 silver Denarii, found in Insula XL, in a black pot, and ranging from the time of Mark Antony to that of Severus. There was some very fine bronze work and glass-ware. One glass vessel had been reconstructed from broken pieces recovered from a rubbish pit. According to Professor Church, the Roman glass consisted of the following constituents out of 100 parts: Silica, 17; alumina, 2; protoxide of iron, 1; lime, 8; soda, 17; traces of magnesia and manganese, 1. Among other curiosities preserved here may be mentioned anvils for reapers or mowers, a peculiarly constructed pump, bones of animals, and pottery.

In the passage just outside the room were three large pavements, which Mr. Hope said were considered to be unique, because they had all been found in one house. The tesserae had been taken up and replaced on the walls of the corridor. There were three types of mosaic pavements found in this country, and it was a very curious circumstance that all three should be discovered in one building. Here, too, was exhibited a model of the west gate of Silchester, and also of the Church. The latter consisted of a nave, apse, aisles, and narthex or portico. The Altar was placed at the west end, and there was also near the entrance a stone basin or laver, which afterwards developed into the holy-water stoup. The church dated from the fourth century. No architectural remains were found, and the whole site had been covered up again, waiting for some rich person to come forward with the money to have it roofed in.

After leaving the museum the party proceeded to the Great Western Hotel for luncheon.

#### THE ANNUAL MEETING.

Immediately after the conclusion of the luncheon, the annual business of the Society was transacted. The Rev. R. H. Pigott, one of the Vice-Presidents, who presided, called upon Mr. Parker to propose the election of officers for the ensuing year. The names of the present officers and committee were read out, and there being no amendment made, or alteration proposed, they were all re-elected as follows:—President, the

Right Rev. the Lord Bishop of Oxford; Vice-Presidents, the Right Hon. Lord Cottesloe, the Right Rev. the Lord Bishop of Reading, Sir Edward L. Lawson, Bart., Leopold de Rothschild, Esq., Baron Ferdinand de Rothschild, M.P., Sir John Evans, K.C.B., D.C.L., F.R.S., F.S.A., the Rev. Randolph H. Pigott, the Ven. the Archdeacon of Buckingham; Committee—The Rev. R. H. Pigott, standing chairman; Colonel Goodall, Mr. T. Horwood, Mr. J. Rutland, Mr. George Weller, Mr. E. Wilkins, Mr. R. H. Russell, Mr. C. W. Raffety, Mr. R. E. Goolden, Mr. Stephen Darby, Rev. C. O. Phipps, Mr. Forbes Laurie, the Rev. E. D. Shaw; Hon. Secretaries—Mr. J. Parker, F.S.A., Mr. A. H. Cocks, F.Z.S., F.R.G.S. (and Curator of the Museum); Treasurer, Mr. John Williams, Bank House Aylesbury; Auditor, Mr. Thomas Horwood.

In reference to the *Nota-Bene* at the end of the list of the Committee, Mr. Parker gave notice that at the next general meeting he should propose the abolition of that part of Rule 3 which provides that "All Rural Deans in the County, being subscribers, are *ex-officio* members of the Committee."

Mr. J. Williams, in presenting the Treasurer's Report, remarked that he thought the Society might be considered to be in a sound position—they had only last year's "Records" to pay for. Years ago they were very much behind in their payments, and the bill for the "Records" seemed to be something like the National Debt—never paid. The financial position would be understood from the following statement:—Receipts, balance in hand, Jan. 1, 1897, £27 : 4 : 4; subscriptions, &c., £98 : 5 : 6; total, £125 : 9 : 10. The expenditure had been—Rent, £6; rooms and caretaker, £4 : 11; printing Records, 1896, £76 : 0 : 4; books and printing, £7 : 6 : 6; sundries, £5 : 5 : 3; treasurer, £5; ditto, £4 : 18; balance in hand, £16 : 8 : 9. The number of members was 177, viz., life members, 16; compounding, 28; annual, 124; honorary, 9.

Mr. Parker, literary secretary, said he would not trouble the meeting with a long statement, as the members would find in the next issue of the RECORDS the preface to a new volume, which would contain his views upon the work of the Society, and he did not think there was any necessity for him to repeat himself on the present occasion. They might congratulate themselves upon being in a prosperous condition, and he was very pleased to hear from Mr. Williams's report that their finances were flourishing. With regard to the work of the Society, he would remind them of the publication of Mr. Cocks's work on "The Church Bells of Bucks"—one of the most carefully prepared books of the kind that had been produced, and of which the County might be well satisfied. Then the papers on the Church Plate of the County, prepared by Mr. Meyers, would be extremely valuable. The catalogues of archæological publications, issued to the members yearly, would put them in touch with societies similar to their own all over the kingdom. In conclusion he thought they were all very much indebted to Mr. Hope, who had most generously come forward to give them the assistance of his great experience upon that occasion as one of the explorers in the excavations at Silchester.

Mr. A. H. Cocks was sorry to say that the Museum was still a disgrace to the Society, and if he thought there was no hope of effecting an improvement he should be ashamed to continue Curator. Mr. Cocks reminded the meeting of the fact that last year they voted £10 for the purchase of a case to be placed in the Museum, to which Mr. Darby, one of their members, had generously added £5, and he—Mr. Cocks—had bought a second-hand case, which would be placed in the Museum and filled with the handsome present they had received from Mr. Rutland of paleolithic and neolithic flints. That would form a nucleus for a larger

collection, and by degrees they hoped to obtain other presentations from persons who visited the Museum. Most of the old cases were only fit for fire-wood, but he trusted as new ones were furnished it would inspire some one with the desire to provide them with a better and more suitable room for the Society's Museum.

Mr. Parker proposed a vote of thanks to the Rev. R. Bruce-Dickson for presenting the Society with a copy of the Stewkley Parish Register from 1545 to 1653, which was seconded and carried.

Mr. S. G. Payne said he should be very pleased to give them a collection of flint implements, and about 2,000 remnants of pottery found in the cutting at Haydon Hill, when they had a proper room and proper cases in which to keep them.

The following new members were then elected :—Mr. Wilberforce Bryant, of Stoke Park, Slough ; Mr. R. W. Hudson, Danesfield ; Rev. W. Robson, Lacey Green Vicarage ; Rev. J. H. Light, Stony Stratford Vicarage ; Mr. W. Foat, Aylesbury ; Rev. James C. Pigot, Cublington Rectory ; Rev. E. A. Selby Lowndes, Whaddon Vicarage ; Mr. G. Herbert Manning, Aylesbury ; Mr. H. Flint, High Wycombe ; Mr. C. H. Elsom, High Wycombe ; Mrs. Clark, Aylesbury ; Lord Boston, Hedsor ; Mr. N. T. Garry, of Taplow.

The Archdeacon of Buckingham (The Venble. C. F. J. Bourke), said it was the first opportunity he had had of being present at one of their annual meetings, and he thought he ought to congratulate their honorary secretaries, Mr. Parker and Mr. Cocks, on the admirable preparations made for the day's excursion, and he begged to move a hearty vote of thanks to Mr. Hope for his kindness in assisting them that day.

Mr. Payne seconded the proposition, which, being carried by acclamation, Mr. Hope very briefly acknowledged the compliment.

Mr. E. Wilkins proposed that a hearty vote of thanks be given Mr. J. Williams, who was chiefly responsible, as organising secretary, for making the arrangements for the day's excursion. This was seconded by the Chairman, who bore his testimony to the admirable way in which Mr. Williams carried out his duties. That gentleman having suitably acknowledged the compliment, the proceedings terminated.

#### AT SILCHESTER.

The party left Reading at about 2.15, and a pleasant drive of a couple of hours brought them to Silchester. Alighting from the vehicles, the visitors proceeded to one of the embankments surrounding the central portion of the city, and Mr. Hope, standing amidst the group, gave a short account of the old city and of the discoveries they had made. He said that the visitors must first of all thoroughly understand two important facts in connection with Silchester. It was no Pompeii they had come to see ; there were no buildings in existence, nor any remains which rose much above the surface of the ground. Another thing to be borne in mind was that the city was entirely civil in character and not military. The only relics found of a warlike nature were a spear-head and some pieces of broken swords. No human remains had been disinterred, except a skull near one of the gates. The raised platform in the centre of the inclosure was the Forum, with the shops near ; a little distance from that was the large Basilica, and the foundations of various other buildings. The place had probably been destroyed during one of the insurrections which took place during the Roman occupation of the country, and there were plenty of evidences that it had been fired and burnt to the ground. Among the ruins had been found a standard with a large bronze eagle. Subsequently a portion of the city, at least, was rebuilt, and the great Basilica was run up in a most

jerry fashion, without colonnades, and constructed of very inferior material, which was in marked contrast with that of the original edifice. People might say, "What a splendid object lesson the place would be—why not leave it open?" The fact was, there was very little to leave open—nothing, as they could see, beyond foundations. Another objection to leaving it exposed was the enormous size of the site—over 100 acres. Mr. Hope then indicated the boundaries of the city, and pointed out where the principal gates were situated. He asked his hearers to note the commanding position the city occupied. During their journey from Reading they had been gradually ascending, until they had reached the elevated tableland upon which they were then standing, whence the ground fell away on every side, and they could easily understand what led the Romans to choose that spot for their city. As they would observe, there were no prominent features to be seen except the lines of walls, and of them there was very little above ground—at the highest points two feet at most. Everything portable had been taken away, and nothing but rubbish left. No road ran through the town, and they had come across nothing that could be assigned to the Saxon period. There had, however, been found a silver penny of King John, who dated some Letters Patent from Silchester, and the coin was doubtless lost during the time of his sojourn in the neighbourhood. There was a country legend, which was connected with other places as well, to the effect that the city was burned down by being set alight by sparrows with burning straw fastened to their tails; but there was no evidence whatever that the houses had thatched roofs. The cemeteries were situated outside the city, the only human remains found within the walls being those of infants—probably stillborn.

A move was then made across a corn-field—part of the site of the city—to where the work of excavation is still being continued, which afforded the visitors an opportunity of witnessing the method pursued in prosecuting the exploration of the site. During the present year a large corridor house was discovered, having three sets of chambers running round a yard. This was rendered more interesting from its having been erected on the site of a still older house, the materials of which had been utilised in the construction of the newer edifice. Near this spot was seen a portion of a large tessellated pavement. Mr. Hope explained the working of a hypocaust, which had been uncovered in a very perfect state, and the Roman methods of heating their dwellings by means of warm air. Occasionally they met with fire-places, but they were exceptional. One very perfect hypocaust was examined, which showed the furnace, the flues for the warm air to pass along, and the passages by which it ascended to the rooms in the upper part of the house. One of them still retained the little trap door just in the state it existed when the building was standing. Mr. Hope said that it had often been stated that the Romans constructed their buildings with stone brought from their own homes; but that was entirely wrong. They used the local and common clunch, white lias limestone, black lias or Purbeck, and red bricks made in Britain. Not a single instance of foreign stone being used was found either at Silchester, Woodchester, or Bignor; but the whole was of native material. The visitors then inspected one of the wells which had recently been re-opened. There was about two feet of water at the bottom, where it was lined with wood still in a perfect state. Some of the wells were round, others square. Returning across the inclosure they had first visited, some of the party inspected a small museum of antiquities on the other side of the road, which now divides the city into two portions. Here was seen a fragment of an altar, dedicated to "Hercules of the Segontiaci," and many other relics too numerous to enumerate.

## RETURN TO READING.

Having spent a very pleasant but all too short a time amid the relics of this wonderful Roman city, the party re-entered the vehicles and drove back to the hotel at Reading, where tea was partaken of, after which most of the members repaired to the Forbury Gardens to view the remains of the once famous Benedictine Monastery founded by Henry I. in 1121, on the site of a religious house which was destroyed when the Danes burnt the town in 1006. This was a mitred Abbey, ranking next to Glastonbury and St. Albans. The royal founder was buried here in 1135, and in 1156 the eldest son of Henry II. was interred with his great-grandfather. The tomb was destroyed at the Dissolution, and the fine old Abbey fell into decay; but its ruins still bear witness to its former grandeur and importance.

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[The foregoing report was prepared by Mr. R. S. Downs, and appeared in *The Bucks Herald* soon after the Society's Excursion. It is here reproduced, slightly revised for the purposes of this publication.—ED.]