



# *The Quarterly Journal*

OF THE

Berks Archaeological and Architectural Society.

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## *Meetings of the Society.*

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On Wednesday, February 4th, by kind invitation of Mrs. G. W. Palmer, an afternoon meeting of the Society was held at Elmhurst to hear a paper by Mr. W. H. St. John Hope, M.A., Secretary of the Society of Antiquaries, on "Recent excavations on the site of a Romano-British City of Silchester, and their bearing on civil life during the Roman occupation of Britain." A number of maps, plans and drawings illustrative of the city were hung on the walls, while on the table was displayed a selection of objects discovered during the excavations. There was a large attendance, including the Revs. Canon Garry (Chairman), J. M. Guilding, Canon Slatter, P. H. Ditchfield, R. R. Suffield, Mr. and Mrs. G. W. Palmer, Mr. Alfred Palmer, Dr. Stevens, Mr. Fox and Mr. M. Stephenson, Hon. Sec. of the Surrey Archæological Society, (who with Mr. St. John Hope superintended the recent excavations at Silchester), Messrs. C. Smith, S. S. Stallwood, J. K. Hedges (Wallingford), Davies (Wallingford), Nalder Clarke, C. G. Field, J. H. Blake, Sawyer (Maidenhead), J. Rutland (Taplow), J. Egginton, W. H. Cooper, W. W. Williams, Cowslade, G. Gilligan, R. Hart, E. C. Morris, F. Blackwell, and several other gentlemen and many ladies.

Mr. ST. JOHN HOPE commenced by remarking upon the unsatisfactory conditions under which explorations of Roman remains in towns in Britain were generally undertaken, and then said that the

peculiar advantage of excavating at Silchester lay not only in the excellent opportunities afforded by the site, but in the fact that it was occupied by the Romans, not as a camp but as a city, with just such an ordinary, quiet, every day existence as the town of Reading. Observing that the history of the city at Silchester at present was practically a blank and can only be recovered by the aid of such careful and systematic excavation as it was hoped would be carried out there, Mr. Hope described the position of the various remains. Both the east and west gates, he said, strongly resembled in plan as well as dimensions the larger entrances to some of the camps on the Roman wall in Northumberland, especially those of Cilurnum (Chester) and Amboglanna (Birdoswald). As these camps were walled certainly not later than the time of Hadrian (117-118), or according to some authorities as early as the days of Agricola (78-84), we might, perhaps, arrive at some idea of the comparative date of Silchester walls and gates. Up to last year the remains at Silchester included four or five houses, some baths, a circular edifice, supposed to be a temple, and the Forum and Basilica. To these had been added what might prove to be two more temples, another large house—the largest yet uncovered—and, what was more important, nearly the whole of one of the principal insulæ had been uncovered. The insula examined showed that some, at any rate, of the large houses had much garden or other open ground, but it might be that this was in the rich quarter of the city, for if a similar state of things existed in other parts of the site the city would have been very sparsely covered with buildings. This, however, was not very likely, but only systematic excavation could settle the question. It was believed that the public baths of the city had not yet been found. Regarding the water supply, a well appeared to exist east of the Forum, and in the open ground south of the newly-discovered house a well had been found lined throughout with wood, with remains of the wooden bucket and a curious pewter basin at the bottom. Another question to be solved was—How was the city drained? A deep cutting made at the south gate showed that no sewer issued from the city there, as was the usual arrangement, and it was possible that the extraordinary absorptive power of the ground, which was so apparent after any heavy rainfall, might have been found sufficient even to carry off storm water. A further question was—Did the city contain a theatre? There was no irregularity of the ground that would warrant such a supposition, and yet the only theatre unearthed in a Romano-British city showed but

few traces of where it lay beneath the soil before it was excavated. A likely site at Silchester for such a building was the valley south of the Church, where, too, the baths might be looked for. Referring to the temples, Mr. Hope stated that in 1744 an inscription was found on the site of the Forum in honour of the Segontian Hercules. This made it possible to hope that some relics of the temples of the gods might still remain, and if *Calleva*, as would seem most likely, had a continuous existence down to and even beyond the date of the withdrawal of the Roman Government from this island, there might be some chance of discovering the remains of buildings dedicated to Christian rites. The recent excavations had laid bare what might be two temples close to the parish church; one of them, indeed, was partly under the Churchyard, and it was curious to note that its axis was exactly in line with that of the Church itself, which lay east of it. It was quite possible that the Christian temple, which was as old as the twelfth century, and very likely replaced a Saxon Church on the site, might stand upon the remains of a Roman building. Yet further questions suggested themselves for solution. We might expect to find, by careful excavation, many traces of the occupations of the inhabitants. Trades too—and it was impossible but that some trades were practised within the walls—had left evidences of their existence. Of these some very remarkable relics were found during the past year. In clearing out one of the many rubbish pits that were met with in exploring the insula about 60 objects in iron were found, consisting of an extraordinary collection of tools; with one exception the largest yet found in Britain. If they turned from the busy life of the town to the final resting places of its inhabitants they would find a rich field for investigation. Even if the site did not afford to their researches many inscriptions the cemeteries should produce some materials in this form to add to their knowledge of the Roman period, and that knowledge, it was hoped, might also be further increased by the discovery, and either among the ruined buildings of the town or amongst the tombs outside its walls, of coins which would prove of value in the study of numismatics. They were glad to be able to announce that by the kind permission of Mr. Benyon the excavations of the cemetery outside the north gate would be undertaken during the present year, under the able superintendence of Mr. Arthur Evans, keeper of the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford. Another curious fact which had also come under their notice—only further excavations could tell them why and when it was done—was that some of the streets

running east and west had been altered in direction. If so many interesting points had been raised as the result of the present very limited excavations, ought we not to derive encouragement from them to proceed? His answer was "Most certainly, yes." The investigations made by Mr. Joyce, to whom a deep debt of gratitude must be ever due from all Roman antiquaries, though of very great importance in themselves, lacked one important feature—they were conducted on no systematic plan beyond the excavation of each building. The plan on which the work was now being done was to regularly and systematically explore the whole of the area of each of the insulæ into which the city was clearly divided by the intersecting lines of the streets. To do this year by year until the whole area within the walls had thus been systematically explored and planned they must of necessity have a regular supply of funds. Up to the present they had no room for complaint. The balance left from last year's operations had already been increased by further subscriptions, and they trusted that before they resumed work in April or May the list would have grown much longer. Dr. Edwin Freshfield, Vice-President and Treasurer of the Society of Antiquaries, had given £300 to be spent on the excavation of at least one entire insula, and so much else as could be done with the balance; Mr. Walter K. Foster, F.S.A., had also most generously undertaken the excavation of another insula; and he heard that a third gentleman might possibly be induced to do likewise. Might he suggest that two or more gentlemen unite in paying for the excavation of an insula, an average-sized one incurring an expenditure of about £100. He would also commend to the notice of the Berkshire Archæological Society a suggestion which they had reason to hope would be adopted by other Societies. The systematic excavation of Silchester should be considered not as a local work, but what it really was—a national undertaking, that would materially add to the knowledge of the history of this land; for if they might judge by what had already been found Silchester would eventually produce one of the finest, if not the finest, collection of Roman antiquities in this country. He was unable to say where this would be deposited, but one thing was quite clear—that after the main collection had been made there must remain such a number of duplicate and other specimens as would suffice to form more than one representative collection of Romano-British antiquities in any local museum, and the authorities of the Reading Museum might without impropriety ask the Duke of Wellington to allow such a collection to be deposited there.

Mr. Fox then explained, by the aid of diagrams, the difference between a Roman villa such as existed in Pompeii and that found in these northern regions, pointing out that whereas the former was planned so as to exclude the heat the latter was built with a view to internal warmth. Mr. Fox went on to say that attention had in the past been mainly directed to the military aspects of the Roman occupation of Britain, and what they wanted now to learn more of was as to the civil life led in cities like that of Calleva, which was really governed very much as Reading is governed now. It was knowledge of this kind which they hoped to gain by their excavations at Silchester.

Mr. C. SMITH proposed a vote of thanks to Mr. Hope and Mr. Fox for their valuable information ; and a similar acknowledgment was made to Mr. and Mrs. G. W. Palmer for kindly asking the Society to meet at their residence.—This Mr. G. W. PALMER briefly acknowledged, and, on behalf of Mrs. Palmer, invited those present to partake of tea in an adjoining room.

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An afternoon meeting of the Berks Archæological and Architectural Society was held on Wednesday, March 11th, at the Society's rooms, Abbey Gate, Reading, summoned for the purpose of hearing a Paper by Miss E. Thoyts, of Sulhampstead Park, on the proposed Archæological Survey of the County. Mr. CHAS. SMITH, one of the vice-presidents, occupied the chair ; and there were also present the Revs. J. M. Guilding, P. H. Ditchfield, J. E. Tarbat, G. W. Hunt, and R. R. Suffield, Messrs. F. Goolden (Cookham), James Rutland (Taplow), W. F. Blandy, Nalder Clarke, Theodore White, C. W. Taylor, Arthur Smith, &c., and several ladies.

The Rev. P. H. DITCHFIELD explained that Miss Thoyts had written that the Theale road was quite blocked, so that she could not be present. He might, however, say a few words to call the attention of the Society to that very important work of the Archæological Survey, which they hoped would be taken up not only as regarded Berkshire, but all over the kingdom. Last year the Society of Antiquaries in London called together representatives from the local societies to confer about certain matters in connection with the study of Archæology, and, at the request of the Berkshire Society, he attended. Several interesting matters were discussed, one of the chief being the suggestion that a complete archæological survey should be made for the whole of England—a gigantic undertaking

indeed. It was thought that all recorded discoveries in the Newspapers, in *Archæologia*, &c., should be gathered together, and that each society should take up the work in its own county. The idea was that each society should get a large Ordnance Survey map, and on it record all the finds and discoveries with which it was acquainted. The Berks Society was very much indebted to Miss Thoyts, who, at his request, had very kindly undertaken the superintendence of that particular work for their society. It was hoped that people connected with different parts of the county would communicate with that lady, and send her any pieces of information with which they were acquainted. As examples of recent "finds" he mentioned the great discovery by Dr. Stevens of the Saxon cemetery in the King's Road, and said that on the railway near Pangbourne there had very recently been made another discovery of skeletons of great antiquity. Berkshire was very rich indeed in antiquarian remains, and it was for them to gather together all the results of past and present labours, to duly record them, and hand them down to posterity.

The Rev. J. M. GUILDING said the proposed survey was one of the most important subjects that had come before their society for a very long time. He thought the Society of Antiquaries in putting the scheme before the various county societies was doing a very valuable historical work indeed. Geological maps had proved of great value to those who studied that branch of science, and he was perfectly convinced that an archæological survey would prove intensely interesting. Berkshire was behind no other county in its archæological interest, and much remained to be discovered. In illustration of this he mentioned the discovery by Mr. James Rutland of a Saxon burial place not long ago at Taplow, the gold ornaments, &c., of the chiefs being now in the British Museum; and the still more recent discovery by the Rev. F. T. Wethered amongst the muniments of Westminster Abbey, of the original charter of Edward the Confessor to Hurley Monastery.

A discussion on the subject followed, in the course of which Mr. W. F. BLANDY spoke of the value of preserving ancient legal deeds; and the idea of making such a survey of the county as had been suggested was unanimously approved.

[Miss Thoyts' paper is published in this number.]