




An Archæological Surbey of Berkshire.

By Emma Elizabeth Thoyts.

T is proposed by this Society to begin a collection of records and discoveries, ancient and modern, past, present, and future, which now exist, and are known of, or any day may be brought to light. Such real evidence, and not merely the theories, speculations and assertions of writers, will furnish material of great value to the Antiquary, beyond dispute and criticism, and help towards forming such a history of our County as at present we do not possess.

The earliest written record is to be found in the Saxon Chronicle, but, unfortunately, it gives us information which is meagre and unsatisfying. Domesday Survey represents the Norman period, but much of it puzzles us as to measurements; and even what places are meant in many cases is open to question. For the history of the succeeding centuries we may search among public records and private manuscripts, or refer to brief passages in the early Chroniclers. The first popular work on Topography is the "Britannia," of Camden, written the end of the 16th Century. It was a ten years' labour to compile. Locally, its value to us is not great, because the author drew his information principally from Leland and other writers, not from personal knowledge, for we do not know that he was ever in the County, except, perhaps, journeying along the main roads to or from London. Ashmole, on the contrary, resided in Berkshire and collected his MSS. while there, yet he is not responsible for the many errors contained in his book as it was not published until after his death, which occurred in 1692. "Walpole's British Traveller," compiled obviously from other works, is a rather curious and little known account. "Dugdale's Monasticon" contains an outline of the early Ecclesiastical history of Berkshire; of the lesser religious houses he gives very few details of any interest. Lyson's is, of all the books written about Berkshire, the one best known; he borrowed freely from his predecessors, adding thereto

notes from public records ; nor can implicit reliance be placed in all his statements. Less known and more modern writers there are, yet all, more or less, rely too much upon the above-named works, and only perpetuate their inaccuracies. Colonel Cooper King has recently published a County history, but it is not voluminous enough to satisfy the Antiquary.

Thus it will be clearly seen that a wide field of enquiry is, at the present time, open to the local Antiquary, especially now that we have an Archæological magazine wherein to record discoveries and argue out and compare theories. For, like all such publications, its interest and value depends chiefly upon its subscribers, contributors, and readers, all of whom can, without difficulty, send interesting items of information, if they will only take the trouble to do so, or by sending queries to it may direct attention and enquiry into new channels.

For the study of pre-historic man in Berkshire we enjoy great opportunity and much encouragement from Dr. Stevens' very large collection in the Reading Museum, which gives us a vast number of curiously interesting relics, and only wants one thing to make it more valuable, namely, a well written descriptive catalogue or account.

Stone implements are often found, principally on clay land or the chalk hills. Personally, I only know one spot where they have been picked up, that is around Purley. This winter a fine Celt was dredged up out of the Kennet at the Arrow Head by the workmen engaged in cutting through the bend of the river at that point.

Succeeding ages are represented by the immense number of barrows and tumuli to be found in the County. In the "History of the Hundred of Compton" alone sixty are enumerated, and probably many more exist.

No two barrows are alike. There is the round barrow and the oval tumulus, and every known form of sepulture, varying according to tribe or nation—British, Saxon, Danish, or Anglo-Saxon. In Berkshire each period is represented. These barrows are chiefly to be found in the hilly parts of the Downs, for two reasons—first, because the people whose tombs these are, were warlike clans or tribes, who took advantage of the high ground, adding to its natural defences by strong earthworks, forming thus secure fortresses, many of which remain to this day ; and secondly, because on the lower ground cultivation would, in course of ages, obliterate all traces of such tumuli, if they had existed.

In 1860, a most interesting discovery was made at Long Wittenham, of an ancient Cemetery. It was discovered by accident whilst digging the foundations of a cottage. The explorations were carried out under the direction of Mr. Akermann, one of the most learned men of his time ; as many as 127 graves were opened, one was especially interesting, as being without doubt the last earthly resting place of some early Christian, because in it was found a most remarkable silver stoup. We know that in A.D. 635, Cynegils was baptised at Dorchester, where a Bishopric was then established by the Italian Missionary, Birinus, from which centre Christianity spread over the surrounding country in all directions, both far and near.

Another ancient Cemetery (probably Roman) has of late years come to light in Reading. At Stanmore, in 1815, a tumulus was explored. There legends existed of a burial in a gold or silver coffin, but no such relic was found. So great was the superstitious awe with which this mound was regarded, that when the exploration began and there came on storms of hail and thunder, twice stopping the work, the people attributed this to Divine vengeance on the sacrilege and the labourers refused to proceed any further with the exploration.

Many other barrows have been opened and explored at various times, especially during the years 1814-5, 1847-8 and 1860-5.

I am told two skeletons were discovered the other day, in widening the Great Western Railway at Tilehurst. These were only about 18 inches below the surface ; some heads and teeth were with them it is said.

The period of the Roman occupation must always be interesting, as the time when a universal civilization of our country was first attempted. Roman Berkshire requires much more practical study than it has hitherto met with. Too much faith has been placed upon the very shadowy Itineraries of Antonine, from which standpoint each antiquary has started off with theories of his own, instead of working out the problem from existing traces of that great nation in the county. First of all, towards solving the knotty point, is the question of Roman roads. These were too solidly constructed to perish utterly, even when disused for centuries.

It is said a Roman town lies buried at Compton. The much disputed Calleva has been variously placed at Wallingford, Streatley, Calcot and Southcote, while at Hampstead Norris and Bucklebury so many remains have been found that it is just possible that one of

these so-called Roman villas might, as in the case of Brading in the Isle of Wight, prove to be a town instead of a country house. On the subject of existing remains I would here wish to refer to the various dykes or banks which cross the county, the two largest of which are known as the Devil's Dyke and Grim or Grimmer's Bank or Dyke. The use of these curious banks have never yet been decided. The most probable theory is that they were lines of demarkation or tribal boundaries. In Wiltshire, where they have been explored, Roman coins and pottery have been brought to light, so perhaps these banks were raised to serve a similar purpose as the great walls of the north of England. The course of these banks clearly extended for many miles. They could only have been raised in times of peace, for the construction was evidently a work of great labour and time. The solid bank of earth was not merely thrown up, but must have been brought and piled upon the ground.

The portion of Grim's Bank least noticed is that which I believe started from the junction of the Thames with the Kennet at Reading; the only remains of it in that neighbourhood being in Southcote Lane, here coins have from time to time been dug up. Across Burghfield and the low ground of the meadows all trace is lost, yet in some fields called Folly Park, it is again marked, we lose it after that, but I am told that here my grandfather levelled it. At Ufton Common it commences and through Ufton Wood, Padworth and Aldermaston it is fairly perfect, but after this point I know nothing of it or its direction. Was there ever any connection between this bank and those of north-west Berkshire?

The old names of manors may often be found still used as field names, and from these latter much may also be learnt. Most of our field names are of Saxon derivation, though, in many cases, so corrupted from their original form as to be almost unrecognisable, and the meaning of the old name has perished but its sound is yet preserved. For example, no one now calls Oxen Fearras, or knows the meaning of the fields in Burghfield called Ferres Moor. Nor are the following Saxon words used except as field names:—Culver, a dove; Fleet, little stream; Hither, further; Picked or Pickett, three cornered; Birstein, birch tree; Ham, a field. Properties might change hands or even be re-christened, but the country people retained by oral tradition the old field names known to their forefathers.

At the Reformation, when immense changes of ownership took place, tenants' names gradually began to replace the older field

names. The Yeomen who, for generations, had held the farms either for lives, under the Lord of the Manor, or by service, then became owners by purchase ; and again, rather more than a century later, the Civil War and consequent poverty caused a still further sub-division of lands. But the manorial history of a parish, when carefully investigated through old Deeds and Charters, will generally reveal and account for all the names of this class and fix the dates. Each parish, however small, has a history interesting, perhaps, only to those belonging to the place, yet still worth tracing out and recording ; for, after all, a County History is only a collection of such parish records collected together.

I have endeavoured briefly to sketch the main features of our local history, which need special attention. I will, therefore, only add that any information on any of these points, or on kindred subjects, will be gladly received by the Secretary, the Rev. P. H. DITCHFIELD, Barkham Rectory ; or by myself, to enable a systematic arrangement to be made, and maps to be marked.

READING MUSEUM.—Twelve extremely fine specimens of various vases have recently been added to the Museum, eleven of them being ancient Greek and the remaining one ancient Peruvian.

HISTORY OF WOKINGHAM.—The lecture on Wokingham by the Secretary was repeated in the Wokingham Town Hall, on March 19th, at a Meeting organised by the members of the Wokingham Institute. There was an exhibition of municipal documents and curios, and the Master of Lucas' Hospital gave a short history of that Institution. He has discovered some interesting MSS. amongst the muniments of the Hospital.

THE SOCIETY'S PRIZES.—The Society's prizes to the Students of the University Extension Lectures have been awarded to Miss Ella Deverell and Miss Mary Beale. The drawing of Mr. Arthur Smith, which gained him the society's prize last year for the best architectural drawing, has been reproduced in the *Building News*. It is a very careful and accurate representation of the iron gates at Mapledurham.

WALLINGFORD.—In the April number of the *Antiquary* Mr. W. R. Davies describes some curious leaden discs which were found under an old floor in the Town Hall of Wallingford. Some of them bear the date 1699 and 1724, and he supposes them to be tallies used by the cloth sellers of the period.