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Excursions of the Society.



On July 29th an excursion was made to Stoneleigh Abbey, Coventry and Kenilworth. The party assembled at Reading Station and travelled by train to Leamington. Thence they proceeded to Stoneleigh Abbey, which was visited by the kind permission of Lord Leigh. Here Mr. W. G. Fretton, F.S.A., who has made a careful and life-long study of the antiquities of the neighbourhood, met the party, and kindly acted as *cicerone* for the day. He pointed out the remains of the old monastic buildings, and much interest was taken in the fine collection of pictures which the modern portion of the mansion contains. The company proceeded to Coventry and inspected S. Michael's Church, the remains of the Cathedral, Holy Trinity Church, the Guild Hall, Bablake and Bond's Hospitals, S. John's Collegiate Church and the old Bull Inn, where Mary Queen of Scots was imprisoned in 1569. The visitors lunched at the King's Head Hotel, and after completing the Coventry programme, proceeded to Kenilworth Castle, which was fully described by Mr. Fretton; thence returning to Leamington, where they took the train to Reading.

An Excursion organised by the Maidenhead and Taplow Field Club and Thames Valley Antiquarian Society in conjunction with our Society was made to Silchester on Thursday, September 3rd. The party numbered between 50 and 60, and included the following : Dr. Playne (President of the Field Club), Mr. James Rutland (Hon. Sec.), Sir George Young, the Rev. W. A. Hill, the Rev. R. P. Newhouse, Messrs. R. Sawyer, Goolden, Gardner, Arrowsmith, Mr. and Mrs. Wethered, Messrs. R. Silver, J. Silver, F. Brown, W. Walker, Lodge, Mrs. Rolls, Mr. and Mrs. Shave, Mrs. Farr, Mrs. Nicholson, etc. ; Rev. J. M. and Mrs. Guilding, the Rev. P. H. Ditchfield, Mrs. Simonds, Mr. J. H. Cooper, Mrs. Slocombe, Mr. F. H. Sparrow, and several ladies ; also Mr. J. L. Waldron, of Ramsbury.

The party first visited the Amphitheatre which is thus described in the excellent descriptive paper on Silchester which had been prepared by Mr. Rutland :—"The Amphitheatre is oval in form, similar to that of Dorchester, the diameter being 150 by 120 feet ; Dorchester, 219 by 138 feet ; Cirencester, 148 by 134 feet ; and Richborough, 200 by 166 feet. Its superficial area is 1,800 feet or 2,000 feet. The bank consists of a mixture of clay and gravel, and is 50 feet wide at the bottom and about 12 feet at the top. The seats were ranged in five rows, which were visible about 100 years ago. The terraces were 6 feet deep, probably faced with masonry and covered with wood, and very probably the whole building was covered with wood. The principal entrances being north and south (Vomitoria) are still visible. The cavea, or den, was on the south side, where the wild beasts were kept before they were led into the arena to combat with the criminals who were condemned to die. This was also sometimes the place for public execution, shows, the athletic games, and where the naked gladiator or prize fighters used to exhibit their skill. The Rev. Mr. Bingham supposes that 10,000 persons might be seated on the sides of this amphitheatre. He also says that upon investigation he discovered that the arena had been covered with sand, to the depth of two or three feet, in order to keep the wrestlers from receiving injury by the falls they sustained. At times the arena was filled with water." Some of the party also visited the church, which has a finely timbered roof, a piscina, and a noteworthy altar tomb, the edifice dating back to the twelfth century, and being probably one of the earliest sites for Christian worship in the country.

Re-assembling at the Little Museum, the visitors were informed by Mr. M. STEPHENSON of the recent works conducted under the auspices of the Society of Antiquaries, after which he conducted the party over the excavations now in progress to the west of the Forum, and among other things pointed out a square of tesserae *in situ* recently uncovered, which, he explained, it is intended to take up and place in the Silchester Section of the Reading Museum, it being, he said, the best piece of tesserae yet discovered at Silchester. Near by were the exposed foundations of another house, where the burnt remains of coins and building materials were found, and as shewing the intense heat to which they had been exposed presumably at the time of the supposed destruction of the City by fire, it was stated that even the coins became a mass of powder on being simply touched. There were at this point traces of an earlier building than the one on the ordinary level, and it was expected that further excavation would throw more light on this unusual circumstance. A little to the south of this position, the best bit of foundation yet disclosed was shewn, revealing the remains of what are supposed to have been a row of shops on the street front. A common corridor behind led down to a room containing a heating apparatus, with furnace, &c., in good condition, and the method of warming the apartments could be well defined. A feature of the plan appeared to be that the smoke was carried away by a common chimney stack much as with us in the present day. The ashpit belonging to the furnace was indicated. Beyond the shop was apparently a summer apartment, inasmuch as it was without any heating arrangements, whilst another small room, seemingly detached, presented the curious feature of the wall resting on the floor of the room.

After Dr. PLAYNE, in the name of those present, had cordially thanked Mr. Stephenson for the information he had given them, the party proceeded to the "Crown" Inn, Silchester Common, where they partook of a meat tea. Before separating, the Rev. P. H. DITCHFIELD congratulated Mr. Rutland on the success which had attended his arrangements, and expressed a hope that the two societies might again join forces in a future excursion.

The visitors returned to Reading *viâ* Mortimer and Grazeley.