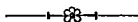


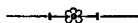


Berks Archæological and Architectural Society.



REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE

FOR THE YEAR 1895.



THE record of our Society for the past year, so far as Antiquarian research is concerned, has neither been uneventful nor uninteresting. But on its Architectural side we have again to lament that the Society has accomplished but little, nor have we been able to render any material assistance in contributing to the restoration of Churches and ancient Monuments within the boundaries of the County.

NOTABLE OCCURRENCES OF THE YEAR.

Among the notable occurrences of the year we may mention (1) the presentation to the town by Arthur Hill, Esq., of a *fac simile* copy of the famous Bayeux tapestry executed by the Leek Embroidery Society. This is not only a triumph of skilful needlework but a valuable addition to the Historic treasures of our Town. (2) We have also to mention a very interesting discovery in Ashampstead Church of some mural paintings, probably of the XIV. century. These have been judiciously preserved through the care of the present Vicar, Rev. V. Moyle. (3) A County Society for the Preservation of Open Spaces was formed in April, 1895. The objects of this Society being so nearly akin to our own received our warmest sympathy, and permission was given to hold their meetings at our Offices in the Abbey Gateway. (4) The old Pewter plate, formerly used in the Corporation banquets, was discovered during the past year in the cellars of the Town Hall, and being excellent specimens of old pewterers' work, it is now preserved in the Museum. (5) A valuable acquisition to the topographical knowledge of ancient Reading has been made, by an accurate plan of the Abbey precincts executed by Dr. Hurry.

ARCHITECTURAL WORK.

With regard to events of architectural interest we may observe that no public buildings of any magnitude or importance have been recently erected in our neighbourhood. The plans have been approved for the New Art Gallery attached to the Municipal buildings, which it is hoped may in some degree redeem past failures, and serve to mask the ungainly exterior of the eastern side of the Large Town Hall.

The ancient Chantry or Lady Chapel in St. Giles' Church has been restored for Daily Service, and a suitable Reredos erected by the Students of Cuddeston Theological College as a gift to the present Vicar. In another part of the County, the Church of All Saints', Wokingham, has received the addition of a beautiful Rood Screen in memory of the only son of C. T. Murdoch, Esq., M.P.

PUBLICATIONS ON LOCAL HISTORY.

Among the books which have been published, illustrating the History of the County, we may mention, (1) "Lyon's History of Finchampstead"; (2) Four Volumes of the Corporation Diary by Rev. J. M. Guilding, being 1st series of "Records of Reading" (published through the generosity of G. W. Palmer, Esq.). (3) "Notable Events in the History of Reading" by the same author. (4) "Transactions of Newbury Field Club," one of the oldest Provincial Societies for the study of Local History. (5) The Berks, Bucks and Oxon Archæological Journal has taken the place of the Quarterly Journal formerly published by the Society. It contains a record of the Society's work, and much Antiquarian information relating to the three Counties. It is hoped that all members of the Society will become subscribers to this Journal.

Under the head of *Finds and Discoveries* we may observe:—(1) The Excavations at Silchester have been of unusual importance; and the Hon. Secretary of the Silchester Exploration Fund, S. S. Stallwood, Esq., F.S.A., will gladly receive contributions for this important undertaking. To these we may add the Excavations at Cookham and Hedsor of the Celtic Pile structure, and at Wittenham the discoveries of the Romano-British village have been continued by the energy of Mr. T. Hewitt, who purposes to send these interesting finds to the Ashmolean Museum at Oxford.

PRACTICAL WORK OF THE SOCIETY DURING 1896.

During the past year, the Society has followed its usual course of organizing visits and excursions to places of interest during the

summer months, and of offering a varied course of lectures during the winter.

The following Excursions have taken place :—

On May 30th, the Society visited Banbury and Broughton Castle, the seat of Lord Saye and Sele. The history of Banbury was described by Mr. W. Potts, and the Rev. A. Cheales told the story of the Castle.

On June 26th, an Excursion was made to Rotherfield Greys, by the kind invitation of Sir Francis and Lady Stapleton, who entertained the Society, and the Church was visited containing the tomb of Sir W. Knollys, K.G., Earl of Banbury and High Steward of Reading.

On October 2nd, the Society visited Rotherfield Peppard and Wyfold Court, by the kind invitation of Mr. and Mrs. Hermon-Hodge, who entertained the Members.

During the winter, the following lectures have been delivered :— April 24th, 1895, the Bayeux Tapestry, by the Rev. Bedford Pim ; June 27, An Exhibition of the Bayeux Tapestry, by the Rev. J. M. Guilding ; January 29th, 1896, Ecclesiastical Stained Glass, by Mr. E. Blake ; February 26th, Glimpses of Reading in Tudor Times, by the Rev. H. Summers.

Prizes and Donations have been awarded as usual to the Kendrick and High Schools for essays on historical subjects.

The cordial thanks of the Society are due to the Corporation of Reading for the use of the Abbey Gateway, which forms so fitting a centre for the Society's work. The use of the rooms has been granted occasionally to the Ambulance Class, the Open Spaces Society and the Histrionic Society, and for other meetings of an educational character.

The financial condition of the Society will be seen by reference to the Balance Sheet.

GENERAL REMARKS.

Under this head we beg to offer suggestions and recommendations which fall to our province as a County Society. There are two measures which the Society would strongly advocate for immediate adoption :—(1) We would respectfully urge upon the Berkshire County Council the necessity of taking some steps for the custody and better preservation of County Records and other documents relating to the Non-Ecclesiastical Charities and Educational Endowments of our Parishes. Since the passing of the Local Government Act of 1894, which established Parish Councils, all Non-

Ecclesiastical documents, hitherto preserved in the Parish Chest, have been removed from the custody of the Clergy and Wardens. It is to be feared that many of these invaluable treasures have been exposed to injury and loss, nor are proper measures taken for their security. We believe that if the Berks County Council would expend a small sum annually for this purpose, the deeds, wills and documents relating to the various parochial benefactions of the County might be carefully scheduled, and with the consent of the various Parish Councils, preserved in a central situation in the County Town, like the Abbey Gateway, where they could be conveniently consulted at any time. A receipt might be given for them by the custodian, and they could be withdrawn at any time on proper notice being given. We are assured that if such a course were adopted, its advantages would be found so conspicuous, that the example of Berks would be imitated by other Counties. In any case this would be preferable to the present reprehensible carelessness and risk ; or to the alternative of having our Local Records removed by legislative enactment to the Record Office in London. (2) We would also advocate the preparation of a Portrait and Picture Catalogue, giving a description of the family portraits, historical pictures, and art treasures to be found in the galleries of our chief mansions throughout the County. This measure has been advocated warmly at the Annual Conference of Archæological Societies, held at the Society of Antiquaries, London.

PROGRAMME FOR 1896.

The following places are submitted by the Committee as suitable for Excursions during the present year, viz. : Lambeth Palace and Croydon, Netley Abbey and Southampton, Farnham Castle, with Mausoleum of Emperor Napoleon at Farnborough, Marlborough Town and College, Wellington College, Bramshill and Finchampstead. It is proposed to close in the autumn with a demonstration at Reading Museum.

Our Programme of Lectures will embrace papers on the following subjects, viz. : High Stewards of Reading, Battles of the Berkshire Regiment, Historical Account of Schools of English Architecture, The Golden Book of Reading Benefactions, and Lord Saye and Sele of XVII. century (2nd paper).

OBITUARY.

The Society has sustained the loss of two Members, who in their time filled a distinguished position in the county viz. : J. H

Blagrave, Esq., of Calcot Park, High Sheriff in 1873; and John Hargreaves, Esq., of Maiden Erlegh, High Sheriff, 1884. Mr. Blagrave was specially connected with the town of Reading, both by property and hereditary descent. The muniments of this ancient family are of surpassing interest, and will, if they should ever be published, throw a flood of light upon the history of Reading during XVI. and XVII. centuries. Both of these distinguished men were representatives of that class of English gentlemen, the "Great Commoners," who live among their own people, and are equally honoured for independence, public spirit and encouragement of all that is best in national life. They can ill be spared, and it will be difficult to supply their places.

We have also to deplore the loss of the late Thos. Hughes, Esq., County Court Judge of Chester, one who was a Berkshire man by birth, and although not a member of this Society, has lectured before us, and was known and honoured throughout the county for his eminence as an author, and his accomplishments as a scholar. The author of "Tom Brown's School Days" and "The Scouring of the White Horse" has left us an imperishable record of Rugby School in the days of Dr. Arnold, and a picturesque account of Berkshire country life. Henry Seebohm, Esq., of Horton Grange, Maidenhead, an eminent traveller, naturalist, and writer on Ornithology has also passed away. His library and collections have been bequeathed to the nation, and will present the record of his generous and modest character and scientific attainments.

In conclusion, your Committee express their satisfaction at the revived interest now taken in all that pertains to the history of our county. It is gratifying to feel that our Society is not regarded as an association of a few 'dry-as-dust' antiquaries, but that we are serving the useful purpose of making better known the County and land in which we live, of which we are so proud, and which plays so honourable a part in English History.

(Signed) P. H. DITCHFIELD,
J. M. GUILDING.