



Report of the Berks Archæological Society for the Year 1900-1901.

IN pursuance of the duty entrusted to us, the Committee beg to lay before the Annual Meeting of Members a Report of the proceedings of the Society for the past year.

I.—GENERAL OCCURRENCES OF THE YEAR.

Your Committee desire to record with the profoundest regret the great loss which the Society has sustained by the death of our late Sovereign, Her Most Gracious Majesty Queen Victoria, the honoured Patron of our Society. For many years Her Majesty was pleased to honour our Society by bestowing upon it her royal patronage, and this gracious act of kindness to the Archæological Society of the Royal County has ever been highly appreciated by us. At a meeting held in January a vote of earnest sympathy, proposed by Lord Saye and Sele and seconded by Mr. Berkeley Monck, was passed, and the Secretary was instructed to convey the same to His Majesty the King. The following letter was written, in accordance with these instructions :—

“ Abbey Gate, Reading,

“ *February 6th, 1901.*

“ MAY IT PLEASE YOUR MAJESTY,

“ We your Majesty’s most loyal and dutiful subjects, the members of the Berks Archæological Society, of which institution our late most gracious and beloved Sovereign was the honoured Patron, respectfully crave leave to express our heartfelt sorrow at the loss sustained by your Majesty, the Royal Family, and the people of the British Empire, in the death of your Majesty’s revered mother, Queen Victoria.

“ We remember with much gratitude the encouragement and support which our late Sovereign was pleased to give to the study of Literature and History ; and her gracious act of condescension in becoming our Patron, and the great interest which Her Majesty took in all historical research, greatly assisted us in our work.

"We humbly beg to testify our heartfelt congratulations upon your Majesty's Accession to the Throne of England, and to tender the earnest expression of our loyal homage and devotion. From the days of King Alfred, Berkshire has been the home of many English monarchs, and has shared in the joys and sorrows of the Royal Family.

"That your Majesty's reign may be long and prosperous, and that every happiness and blessing may be yours in the Berkshire home of your Majesty's ancient and illustrious House, is the humble prayer of your Majesty's obedient servants, the members of the Berks Archæological Society.

"(Signed) P. H. DITCHFIELD,

"Hon. Secretary."

The following reply was received by the Secretary :—

"Home Office, Whitehall,

"*March 29th, 1901.*

"SIR,

"I am commanded by the King to convey to you hereby His Majesty's thanks for the loyal and dutiful address of the members of the Berks Archæological Society, expressing sympathy on the occasion of the lamented death of Her late Majesty Queen Victoria and congratulation on His Majesty's Accession to the Throne.

"I am, Sir,

"Your obedient Servant,

"CHARLES T. RITCHIE.

"The Hon. Secretary of the

"Berks Archæological Society,

"Abbey Gate, Reading."

Another great and overwhelming loss has been recently sustained by the death of the learned and distinguished Bishop of the Diocese of Oxford. As a true personal friend, as a kind ruler of his diocese, and much-beloved Bishop, he will ever be remembered by Berkshire people ; but his reputation for immense ecclesiastical and historical learning extended far beyond the limits of our own country. His Constitutional History is one of the monumental works of a great period of our intellectual productivity, and a masterpiece of conscientious industry and scientific method. Oxford has every reason to cherish his memory. The active and fruitful school of historical learning at our Universities owes its existence largely to the labours of Bishop Stubbs. The world is indeed made poorer by his death.

As a Vice-Patron of our Society he always took a warm interest in our work, and we shall much miss that genial presence, those kindly words, that tender friendship, which will ever be associated with the memory of good Bishop Stubbs.

Your Committee desire to record their appreciation of the exertions of Dr. Hurry in arranging for the beautifying of the Abbey Gate, the home of the Society, by completing the designs of the architect, Sir Gilbert Scott, by the addition of certain carved heads to the external architecture of the building. The thanks of the Society are due to him and to the gentlemen who contributed various sums of money for this excellent purpose.

The fears of the lovers of ancient buildings were aroused by the proposed demolition of the ancient Hospitium of Reading Abbey, now forming part of Reading College. We are glad to hear that for the present this plan for the destruction of an interesting and venerable edifice has been abandoned, and we trust that whatever schemes may be found necessary for the extension of the Municipal Buildings, it will be possible to preserve this relic of the old Abbey.

The so-called "restoration" of ancient buildings, frequently conducted by men ignorant of the best traditions of English architecture, has not been so mercilessly exercised as in former years. The tower of the ancient Church of North Moreton is being carefully and wisely underpinned and restored, and all its old features preserved. Some donations are much needed for the completion of the necessary works, which were occasioned by the alarming cracks in the walls caused by the late dry summer season, and it is hoped that your Society may be able to contribute to this excellent object. The Committee have voted one guinea to this fund.

The excavations at Silchester are still in progress, under the direction of the Society of Antiquaries, and the results of several years of work have greatly enriched the Reading Museum, which can now boast of possessing the most complete collection of Roman antiquities in England. It is a matter of regret that the Excavation Fund is not more largely supported by the people of Reading, who benefit so greatly by the labours of the Society of Antiquaries, whose officers feel rather strongly on this point. As a Society the Committee feel that we ought to subscribe to the fund, and will gladly receive any contributions from our Members who may be pleased to help forward this undertaking. The Committee have voted the sum of three guineas to the Fund.

The attention of the Members of the Society is especially

directed to the new County History of Berkshire, which is about to be compiled in connection with the Victoria County History series. A County Committee has been formed, of which the Lord Lieutenant, Lord Wantage, has consented to act as Chairman, and some plans for the work have already been arranged. The co-operation of all antiquaries and historians in the county is earnestly solicited, and with their help the promoters trust that at length a complete valuable and reliable County History may at length be written. The Society will spare no pains to assist in attaining this object.

PRACTICAL WORK OF THE SOCIETY.

During the past year the Society has steadily pursued the objects for which it was founded, viz. :—(1) The Contribution of Papers on Architectural and Historic subjects and the personal inspection of historic sites ; (2) The Encouragement of Architectural and Historical Study ; (3) The Publication of Original Articles on the Antiquities of the County.

The year has been marked by considerable activity in the arrangement of lectures and excursions, and the Committee desire to express their thanks to the gentlemen who have read papers before the Society, and to those who have entertained the members on the occasion of their visits to historic places. Five meetings have been held in Reading, when lectures were delivered, and during the summer two excursions were arranged, which were largely attended by the members and friends of the Society.

On May 9th, 1900, the annual meeting was held, when a very interesting lecture was delivered by the Rev. W. H. Summers on "Glimpses of Reading during the Civil War Period."

On June 11th, in conjunction with the Newbury Field Club the Society visited Compton Wynyates and Broughton Castle. The history of the former house was described by Mr. Walter Money, who also read a paper by Lord Saye and Sele on Broughton Castle. Lady Algernon Lennox kindly welcomed the Society, and showed the interesting features of the house. Broughton Church was described by the President.

On August 2nd., the Society visited Abingdon. The Abbey building was described by Mr. Redfern, the architect. The President gave an account of the Churches, and Mr. F. Morland described Christ's Hospital. The Secretary gave a lecture on the history of the town, and Mr. Alderman Harris exhibited the Corporation plate. The Churches of Drayton and Sutton Courtney and the Old Manor House were also visited.

On November 14th, a lecture with musical illustrations on "The Songs of the People, especially Sea Songs," was delivered by Mr. A. F. Ferguson.

On January 30th the Secretary lectured on "Names of Places in Berkshire."

On February 30th, Mr. G. A. Kempthorne gave an interesting lecture on "Some Notes on the Devil's Highway in Berkshire," illustrated by magic lantern slides.

On March 27th the President delivered an extremely valuable lecture on "The Sculptured Tympana of Norman Doorways," illustrated by an unique collection of photographs and magic lantern slides.

CUSTODY OF THE ABBEY GATES.

The Society has endeavoured in every way to fulfil the duties entrusted to them by the Corporation of Reading in committing to their charge this interesting relic of our ancient Abbey. A large number of visitors has been conducted over the ruins by the officers of the Society, and allowed to inspect the Gateway. During the summer the Institute of Journalists met at Reading, and were conducted over the Abbey by Dr. Hurry, and subsequently a lecture was given by the Secretary on the history of Monastic Reading. The large room has been frequently lent for meetings, and been made as useful as possible for educational and other purposes.

Prizes for the study of history have been awarded to pupils at the Kendrick Schools. The Berks, Bucks and Oxon Archæological Journal is still published in connection with this and other county Societies, and contains an account of the proceedings of our Association, and other papers connected with the History and archæology of the county. The financial responsibility of the Journal is entirely borne by the editor, and the committee is of the opinion that all members of the Society should endeavour to subscribe for at least one copy.

A statement of the financial condition and numerical statistics will be furnished by the hon. treasurer, and need not here be repeated, but your Committee is gratified to know that under the able management of Mr. Ravenscroft these are in a satisfactory and flourishing condition.

PROGRAMME FOR 1901-2.

In accordance with our usual custom the Committee hope to arrange an excursion to some chief town in the County, and this year they propose to visit Faringdon or Hungerford. It is pro-

bable that in connection with the Surrey Society an excursion may be made to Wickham Bushes, and probably some afternoon excursions will be arranged.

Members desiring to read papers before this Society are requested to communicate with the Secretary. The thanks of the Society are due to the President, Mrs. Falcon Stewart, Mrs. Williams, and Mrs. Morris Williams for kindly entertaining the members to tea at the afternoon meetings of the members.

The Committee desires to call the attention of Members to certain plans for future work which need to be accomplished, and which can materially be helped forward by those who have leisure and opportunity for the task. There is, first, the Victoria County History of Berks. The collection of information with regard to the topography of the County, the details of parochial history, the gathering together of notes and gleanings relating to each parish, can well be undertaken by many who have the necessary time at their disposal. We earnestly invite their assistance and co-operation. Some years ago an inventory of Church plate was commenced by Mr. Arthur Dasent and the Rev. E. Gardner. We understand that the disastrous fire at the residence of Mr. Dasent's father destroyed many valuable papers, and amongst them the notes which he had made on Church Plate in East Berks. Possibly if these gentlemen are unable to complete the task which they undertook other helpers may be found to finish this important work.

Another work is the Archæological Survey of the County. This was commenced sometime ago by a lady member of the Society, but never finished. This again affords a field for the exertions of the industrious antiquary.

As a County Archæological Society your Committee feel that the delivery of a few lectures and the enjoyment of some excursions, important as these are from an educational point of view, should not be the limit of our exertions. To examine records, collect historic information, print, publish, and preserve our garnered stores for future use—these are some of the duties which devolve upon us. To the discharge of such tasks we shall endeavour to address ourselves, and in carrying out these plans for future work the Committee earnestly desire the co-operation of all the members of the Berks Archæological Society. Thus shall we have a true *raison d'être* for our existence, and be enabled to contribute our mite of endeavour for the education of the world, for the elucidation of present and future problems, by a careful, persevering, and accurate study of the past.

(Signed)

P. H. DITCHFIELD.