



Berks Archæological Society.

REPORT, 1908-9.

YOUR Committee have the honour of presenting their Report for the past year.

Your Committee is of opinion that the work of the Society which has been carried on for so long a period has borne fruit in the increased interest taken by the public in archæological studies, and at no period of its career has it shown greater vigour than at the present time. Originally founded in 1840 as the Berks Ashmolean Society, when it published certain important volumes, such as the Unton Inventories and Laud's Benefactions to Berkshire, and reconstituted under its present title in 1871, it has endeavoured to carry out the objects for which it was founded, viz., (1) to promote a knowledge of local History and Antiquities and the study of Architecture. (2) To collect and publish information on Topography, Monuments, and Art Collections of the County of Berks, including Genealogy, Heraldry, Numismatics, Parochial Records, and all matters comprised under the head of Archæology. (3) To preserve from injury or destruction all Monuments and Ancient Remains in the district. (4) To collect accurate Drawings, Plans and descriptions of the Buildings and objects of interest within the County. Success has not always crowned its efforts. Societies have their periods of slackness as well as of unwonted activity; but the good attendance at our lectures and excursions, the increased respect for the relics of antiquity bequeathed to us by our forefathers, and the general genuinely active spirit and keenness to preserve the memorials of the past, are good signs that the work of the Society during the long period of its existence has not been altogether fruitless.

In comparing our Society with other County Societies we find that there are many which are more flourishing than our own, many that embrace the whole county as the sphere of its operations and have the active support of all the land-owners in the district. The multiplication of kindred Societies in our county, all of which are

engaged in the same work, prevents the existence, in Berkshire, of one strong County Association with large funds at its disposal for publishing records, making excavations and aiding in the preservation of ancient buildings. It would be satisfactory if something could be done to amalgamate such societies, and to form one leading County Society for the purpose of carrying out in their entirety the purposes for the promotion of which such associations exist. There are few County Societies so active as our own as regards the number of excursions and lectures, many contenting themselves with only one or two excursions, without providing any lectures in the winter months.

We are glad to notice that the Borough Council of Reading has resisted the proposal of the Berkshire County Council, who designed in their plan for new offices, to destroy the appearance of the ancient Abbey Gate, of which we are tenants. It would have been a deplorable proceeding to have obscured the view of this interesting structure, and hidden its beauties by a modern building, which like many modern buildings, might not possess any pretensions to architectural merit. We are glad that the Corporation of Reading has acted with such consideration for the beauties of the town over which it rules, and we trust that the town councillors will act in the same spirit when they have to deal with the hospitium or other relics of old Reading.

We wish very respectfully to call the attention of the Berkshire County Council to the need of providing in their new offices, which they propose to build, a room for the safe depository of ancient documents. Among the County Records there are already some of value, and it is advisable that every County Council should provide a fire-proof room and a custodian whose duty it should be to arrange and index such documents, and to invite the possessors of deeds, registers, court rolls, borough records, and other valuable manuscripts, to deposit them in the County Record office where they can be seen and inspected under proper supervision. Several other County Councils have done this, and the opportunity now arises for the Berks County Council to establish a County Record office which will be of immense value to historical students, and in course of time will become the great County depository for all documents relating to the history of Berkshire. We hope that the architecture of the new offices will be worthy of the dignity of this important Council, and show some improvement on the architectural demerits of Reading's Municipal buildings.

We regret that it has been found necessary to demolish the Georgian Town Hall of Newbury. It was built in the year 1740-1742, taking the place of an old and interesting building erected in 1611 in the centre of the market place. The roof of the recent hall was found to be in a dangerous condition, and the road adjoining too narrow for the increasing traffic. We hope that the new Town Hall of Newbury will earn the hearty commendations of all architectural experts, and be worthy of the old town.

We are sorry to hear that the beautiful and interesting Church of Ashbury is in danger and decay. Much has been done in repairing the tower, porch and walls, but the roof has been found to be defective and £800 is sorely needed. The parish is purely agricultural, and the work cannot be done without an appeal to public generosity.

Also the Churches of Avington and Uffington are undergoing restoration under competent architects.

As archaeologists we are grateful to the Earl of Craven for preserving one of the most important of Berkshire pre-historic monuments, the White Horse, on the Hill that bears its name. Several observers received with alarm its gradual disappearance. The Hon. Secretary was consulted by the Hon. Secretary of the Wilts Society with reference to the matter, but it was felt that as the ground was private property, the noble owner might resent a formal request for a scouring. The Hon. Secretary, however, wrote a leading article in *Country Life*, and shortly afterwards the scouring took place. The scouring has been completed according to carefully preserved plans, and the White Horse is as distinct as ever it was.

The Silchester excavations are drawing to a close and during the past year some important discoveries were made. It is unfortunate that permission could not be obtained to excavate outside the city walls in order to discover the site of the cemetery. Many valuable additions have been made to the collections in the Reading Museum, including part of the collections formed by the late Mr. Rutland, some pre-historic implements by Mr. Shrubsole, and some Egyptian antiquities by the Rev. Alan Cheales. We note with satisfaction the appointment of Mr. Mill Stephenson to the office of Hon. Curator of the Silchester collections, than whom no one is more worthy to occupy the position vacated by the lamented death of the late learned Curator, Mr. George Fox.

Dr. Hurry's generous gift of a memorial to King Henry I., the founder of Reading Abbey, to be erected in the Forbury Gardens,

should find a prominent place in our records. Its form will be that of a cross composed of silver grey Cornish granite, twenty feet high, designed in such architectural style as is appropriate to the period. The ornamentation of the head will consist of Early English foliage, on the arms, and the simplest form of dog-tooth ornament on the circle. Five projecting and carved bosses will mark the arms and centre of the cross. The inscription will record the foundation of the Abbey by the King in 1121, and the burial of that monarch before the High Altar in 1136. In-as-much as the cross is to be designed by an accomplished and able architect, Mr. William Ravenscroft, F.S.A., late Treasurer of our Society, we are assured that it will be admirably conceived, and exquisitely executed. As Dr. Hurry wisely remarks, "such historical landmarks which link our civic with our national life, are worthy to be kept in remembrance, since they stimulate local patriotism and a desire to promote the beauty, prosperity and happiness of the place wherein we live." Dr. Hurry has conferred a lasting benefit on the town by his generous and well-devised gift.

MEETINGS AND LECTURES.

During the past year the usual number of meetings of the Society have been held, when lectures have been delivered, and excursions made to places of historic interest.

On May 18th, on the occasion of the last annual meeting, one of the series of the President's valuable lectures on the Churches of the County was given, the subjects being the Architecture of the Churches of Cholsey and South Moreton. The account of these edifices have since appeared in the Society's Journal, with a series of admirable illustrations presented by the lecturer.

On December 3rd, 1908, by the kind invitation of Dr. and Mrs. Eppstein, the Society held its first meeting of the winter session at Reading School, when a lecture was given by the Hon Secretary on the history of the School, showing that it was not founded, as it is generally supposed, by Henry VII. in 1485, but that it was in existence at least 400 years earlier. There was a large attendance of the members, the parents of the boys and of the "gentlemen of Reading School," by which title the scholars were known in the days of Dr. Valpy.

On January 21st, Mr. Harold Peake lectured on "Pre-historic Trade Routes in Britain," and traced the history of the early roads of this country from the tracks along the downs to those improved

roadways used by the Romans. He dealt with a fascinating subject in a most interesting and learned manner.

On February 22nd, Mr. Philip H. Newman, F.S.A., lectured on "Notes, Literary, Artistic and Historical on a Tour in Spain," illustrating his lecture with a beautiful series of lantern slides.

On March 11th, Mr. Arthur W. Sutton gave an interesting and enjoyable lecture on "A Tour East and West of the Jordan, with some account of the Excavations at Gezer." A vivid description of his journey was given, and his lecture was illustrated by some charming lantern slides made from his original photographs.

On March 25th, the President gave another able lecture on "An Architectural Account of the Churches of North Moreton, Brightwell, Long and Little Wittenham." Excellent views were shown of these Churches, and the lecture will be published in the Journal with illustrations presented by the author.

EXCURSIONS.

On June 22nd the Society, in conjunction with the Newbury District Field Club, visited Montacute House, Brimpton d'Evercey, and other interesting places in the Yeovil district of Somerset. It was a very enjoyable excursion and much appreciated by all who were able to accompany it.

On July 28th, the Society visited the interesting portion of the County that lies between Wallingford and Didcot. The interesting Churches of Cholsey, Brightwell, North Moreton, Little and Long Wittenham were described by the President, Sinodun Hill by the Hon Secretary, and a paper on the Dunch family was read by Mr. Walter Money, F.S.A.

On October 6th, the Society visited Guildford, Compton and Loseley Park. Mr. Ralph Nevill, F.S.A., kindly acted as cicerone, conducting the party to various objects of interest, and giving graphic descriptions of the principal buildings. Among those visited were the Museum, St. Mary's Church, the Castle, described by Mr. Malden, F.S.A., Abbot's Hospital, an old house in the High Street, and the Angel Hotel. Loseley Park, the former seat of the More family, was inspected by the kind permission of General Palmer, and Compton Church was admirably described by Mr. Thackeray Turner.

The cordial thanks of the Society are due to the gentlemen who have delivered lectures and to those who have entertained the members at the meetings of the winter session, or during the excursions. The names of our lecturers have been already recorded.

Among our hosts and hostesses, to whom our gratitude is due, are the following :—The Rev. T. D. and Mrs. Hopkins, Admiral and Mrs. Clutterbuck, Mr. and Mrs. Hewett, all of Long Wittenham, Dr. and Mrs. Powell, of Piccards Rough, Guildford, the President and Mrs. Keyser, The Rev. Dr. and Mrs. Eppstein, the Misses Deacon, Mr. and Mrs. Arthur W. Sutton.

During the ensuing summer the Committee hopes to arrange a series of excursions, and the following have been suggested :—

Wells and Glastonbury.

Henley and district, in connection with Oxfordshire Society.

Sonning, Cookham, Bisham Abbey.

Beaconsfield, Jordans, Chalfont St. Giles.

Chipping Norton, Rollright Stones and district.

PUBLICATIONS.

The publication of the third volume of the Victoria County History of Berkshire has been somewhat delayed, but we hope that progress will be made shortly, and the General Editor intends that the Berkshire volumes shall be amongst the earliest that are completed.

The Berks, Bucks and Oxon Archaeological Journal continues to be published, and the first number of the 15th volume is about to be issued. The last volume contains the President's Architectural Account of the Churches of Cholsey and South Moreton, with many illustrations, Mr. Acton Pile's transcription of the Feet of Fines for Berkshire, so valuable for genealogical purposes, Mr. Money's notes on the Dunch Family of Little Wittenham, and on Steventon, Mr. Wethered's articles on White Waltham and Shottesbrook, the Editor's notes on the Manor houses of Sutton Courtenay and the Reading Pageant, some papers relating to Oxfordshire and Bucks, and the usual notes and queries concerning the three counties.

We are glad to know that the Newbury District Field Club proposes to publish a new volume of Transactions, under the able Editorship of Mr. Walter Money.

Some years ago Mr. Nigel Bond, the Secretary of the National Trust for Places of Historic Interest and Natural Beauty, lectured before the Society, and gave a graphic account of the good work the Trust had accomplished in preserving many ancient buildings, monuments, and other objects of interest. The success of the Trust is largely due to the aid of local Societies in pointing out objects worthy of preservation. In Berkshire the monument of

Lucius Cary, Viscount Falkland, and Newtown Common, Newbury, are in the possession of the Trust. The Trust invites the co-operation of the Society, and the Committee recommends that our Society should be affiliated with the Trust, and pay an annual subscription of one guinea.

Want of funds has prevented the carrying out of any work of excavation during the past year. Your Committee would welcome the donation of any funds for this purpose, and the active interest of skilled members of the Society in the conduct of such excavations. We are glad to hear that some interesting barrows have been excavated during the past year under the superintendence of Mr. Harold Peake, and we hope that the results will be commensurate with the skill and labour bestowed upon them.

We have to regret the departure from Reading of the Rev. Alan Cheales, who acted as our Librarian, and took a keen interest in the work and welfare of the Society. Your Committee has elected Mr. Cheales as honorary member.

We have to regret with much sorrow the death of Mr. Alderman Hill, who, while health and strength lasted, was a good friend to Reading and the Berks Archæological Society. He was highly esteemed by all who knew him. He presented to Reading that valuable replicé of the Bayeaux tapestry, which still adorns the picture gallery in the municipal buildings.

We have also to deplore the death of Dr. Playne, a member of our Committee, a constant attendant at our meetings, and a keen antiquary.

Your Committee will endeavour during the opening season to arrange a series of excursions and lectures which we hope will be agreeable and useful to the members, and gladly would welcome any suggestions which the members may make. We ask for the cordial support of each member during the present season, and increased interest in the welfare of the Society. This may be shown by constant attendance at our meetings and excursions, by helping to increase our membership by proposing to the Committee new candidates for election, and by each member doing his utmost to promote the principles of the Society in his own town and neighbourhood.