

The Local History Recording Scheme: Berkshire Branch

By C. B. WILLCOCKS.

The Berkshire Branch of the Local History Recording Scheme was founded in March, 1924, and is working under the direction of a Committee composed of representatives of the different Societies to which it is affiliated. The Rev. P. H. Ditchfield is Chairman, and excellent progress is being made with the work. Already the Branch has some 250 Local Correspondents, covering two-thirds of the Parishes in the county. It is hoped before long that there will be representatives of the Scheme in every Parish in Berkshire. An Oxfordshire Branch of the Scheme was inaugurated in July, 1924, and a number of Local Correspondents have been enrolled in other counties in which it is proposed to form Branches of the Scheme.

At the meeting of the Congress of Archæological Societies, held at Burlington House last November, the Scheme and its proposed extension was considered and approved.

The Scheme was originated to save the old legends, traditions and interesting facts of local history which were perpetuated in the past by being handed down round the fireside from one generation to another but which now, owing to changing social conditions, will shortly be forgotten unless they can be recorded before they become extinct. Also to record the interesting discoveries so frequently made when demolishing ancient buildings, during excavations and when going through old papers, etc., which often contain much of local interest.

Already over one hundred records have been received. The following notes on some of these will be of interest not only to those who are acting as Local Correspondents but to others who appreciate the work the Committee is doing.

The Berkshire records include:—From Abingdon records giving particulars of the interesting finds that were made when two old buildings were pulled down. These included bones of great antiquity, one being the frontal plate and horns of the 'Bos Longifrons'; pottery, coins and tokens, and moulded

stones which had at one time apparently formed part of Abingdon Abbey.

From Ardington, giving a list of the inscriptions in the Churchyard. Similar valuable lists have been received relating to Ashbury, Compton Beauchamp, Goosey and Shrivenham, and a number more have been promised.

From Bradfield records relating to Roman remains and Bradfield Monastery. Records received from Chieveley include illustrations of old Oare Church before it was restored and of the old Rectory Farm House, of which only a small portion still remains, a list of the coats of arms in Chieveley Church, and particulars of ancient documents relating to the Parish.

Cookham records give particulars of British and Roman camps on Maidenhead Thicket.

Records received from Finchampstead, Swallowfield and Wargrave contain interesting legends.

From Grazeley a record giving particulars of curious happenings at 'The Old Bell Inn' in 1870. East Hanney records give particulars of the find of an early Quern such as were used from the Stone Age to pre-Roman times, an interesting photo of four generations of mowers, the eldest of whom was 104 when he died, and photographs of cottages illustrating an old form of construction. A West Hanney record contains a photograph of the monument of Elizabeth Bowles, who was buried in 1718, aged 124. A record from Littlewick Green gives the evolution of the name and notes how it has changed from Saxon to modern times. Another record from this parish gives particulars of finds of Roman remains. The Reading records include particulars of a Romany funeral rite and of the Saxon burial urn recently found in Southcote Lane. This urn, which is now in Reading Museum, is of black pottery, ornamented with bosses. It is of a type not before found in the neighbourhood; but urns of the same class have been found in Cambridgeshire.

A valuable series of records concerning old Caversham has been received. Several of these deal with Roman remains, discovered from time to time in the parish, which proved the existence of a previously unknown Roman settlement in this neighbourhood. Another record of the memories of an old inhabitant gives an interesting account of the rejoicings at Caversham in

1814 after the 'First Peace of Paris,' which included an open-air dinner at the bottom of the field then called The Mount—*i.e.* opposite the wall of the present Rectory Garden, for which one hundred puddings were made at the Church Gate—the house now known as 'Banksfoot.' Another record gives the names of the open fields previous to enclosure in 1834, from which we learn that 'Hay Meadow' adjoined the river where the approach to Reading Bridge now passes, whilst part of the golf links was then known by the name of 'Lye.' Other Caversham records give particulars of 'Little End,' where once was situated the Village Pound and thatched Parish School, the seventeenth century arch discovered during the demolition of Caversham Bridge, and of discoveries made in St. Peter's Churchyard when digging the foundations for the recent extension of the church, etc.

From Long Wittenham an exceptionally interesting series of records has been received, such as it is hoped may in time be received from many other parishes. They include notes on bells and brasses; an account of the laying of a ghost, for which purpose a religious service was held to exorcise the supposed ghostly visitor; notes on an old miser, the village cross, cock fighting and the Haywards of Wittenham. This last record is both historical and amusing, as the following quotations show:—

'In the eighteenth century the Haywards were a very poor family, living at Long Wittenham. John, the eldest, was nagman to Madam Trevors. After a time Mrs. Trevors put him into a farm and he married her niece. Mrs. Trevors was somewhat eccentric; she would not allow any of her underclothing to be hung out on the line for fear a man would see it; she had it washed and dried in her bedroom, and when she had a bath in a wooden tub she used to wear a flannel dressing-gown because she did not like to be quite undraped. She also thought that she was made of china-clay, for she told one old woman that people were made of clay, but of two sorts—china and common. "Now, I am made of china-clay, but you are made of common, like they make the red pans of." She made the woman very angry telling her that she was made of common clay; she never forgave her. . . . William

Hayward was a ploughboy. He ran away to sea and took to smuggling. When he had made some money he went over to Paris and bought a lot of lace, and came back and opened a shop in Oxford Street, and got on well and was made the Court lacemaker. On the death of his brother John in 1790, he returned to Wittenham a wealthy man and married a Miss Jennings, a lady with money, and made the farm house belonging to the Manor into the new Manor House, and became the squire of the Parish. There were only three Squire Haywards, all William; the last failed, lost his money by gambling and gave up the shop in London; but it still goes by the name of Hayward. He was fond of telling that one day he lost £3,000 os. od. before breakfast, but that did not spoil his breakfast.'

Another Long Wittenham record contains notes on William Dyke, who, by accident, fired the first shot at Waterloo which started the battle. For this he was court-martialled and sentenced, but reprieved on account of the victory.

A sensational ghost story has been received from South Moreton.

'In 1804 the father of the local wheelwright hanged himself in his barn with the "hair line." Various people were terrified shortly afterwards by an apparition in the stackyard, just south of the barn, which was supposed to be his ghost. This became so alarming that a body of eleven clergy from the neighbourhood met together to lay the ghost in the pond that was in the yard of the premises. Two labouring men, John and James Parkes, desirous of seeing the result, hid themselves under the straw in the barn. As the clergy proceeded with the ceremony, the ghost manifested his presence and demanded which would they give him, the cock on the dunghill or the two mice under the straw? Fortunately they offered the cock. Instantly the cock's head flew off and the body was torn to pieces; but it seems that the ghost was laid, for nothing more was seen or heard of it.'

Interesting records have also been received:—From Sonning, which deal with the Blagrove and Palmer families and with the sojourn of Bishop Ralph Brownrigg in the village in about 1645, also with the Rev. Robert Wright, D.D., Vicar of

Sonning in 1604, who was the first Warden of Wadham. From Wallingford and Wokingham, giving accounts of the findings of human remains. From White Waltham, with particulars of Place and Field names. From Mortimer and Ufton, with particulars of tumuli in those parishes, several of which are not recorded on existing maps. Other records give particulars of the Camlet way, of the consecration of Twyford Church in 1847, and an interesting verse of weather lore relating to Shottesbrooke, etc.

Oxfordshire records deal with discoveries at Bampton, Chinnor, Goring, Mapledurham, Nettlebed and Nuffield, etc., including interesting discoveries made during the demolition of an old building at Bampton and particulars of an hitherto unrecorded camp at Goring Heath.

From Iver, Bucks, several most valuable records have been received, consisting of notes on the history of the parish, a reproduction of an old parish map and a woodcut of the church, and 'Notes from old inhabitants.' This latter is the type of record of which it is hoped that many more will be made before so much of interest in local history is lost which can only be gathered from the lips of the older residents. Other Bucks records deal with Bledlow, Colnbrook, Langley Marsh and Radnage.

Hampshire records give particulars of the site of a probable flint factory at Petersfield and a note on 'The Cunning Man of Tadley,' a local worthy who was credited with being possessed of occult powers.

Such are briefly the first fruits of the scheme in Berkshire and the adjoining districts. The Berkshire records can be consulted at the Reading Central Reference Library and the Oxfordshire records at the City Library, Oxford, where they are filed under Parishes and indexed under subjects. The duplicate copies of the records are kept at the British Museum Library (MSS. Department), London. During the short time that the scheme has been in operation, records have naturally only been received from a comparatively few parishes; but if, as is hoped, everyone interested in such matters will act as a Local Correspondent, a collection of local records will be built up which will be of the greatest national value, and much interest will be saved which the country cannot afford to lose.

The hon. secretary of the Berkshire Branch of the Scheme is Miss Maslen, University College, Reading, who will be glad on receipt of a postcard to send to anyone who will act as a Correspondent a supply of record forms and a copy of the 'Notes for Local Correspondents,' containing particulars of the kind of information required and how it should be recorded. Miss Maslen will also be pleased to supply particulars of the Scheme to anyone interested in other counties, register them as Local Correspondents, and arrange when a Branch of the Scheme is formed in the Correspondent's county for them to be transferred to that Branch. As Local Correspondents are not asked to keep up a regular correspondence with regard to the Scheme, but only to note when opportunity occurs interesting discoveries and events and the old legends and traditions in which our country is so rich, and which should be recorded before they become extinct, it will be understood that the duties of a Local Correspondent are not burdensome, but rather in the nature of a labour of love to anyone interested in such matters.

In all parishes something of interest will be found to record from time to time. For instance, in very few parishes have the field names been chronicled. It is quite possible for people to live for many years in a place without realizing that every field has a name. Such names can best be recorded by filling them in on a 6 in. ordnance map, which map, when completed, should be sent to the County Hon. Secretary of the Scheme with a covering record form giving any special notes not included on the map. Surnames should also be noted, especially of those families who have always lived in the village or locality.

Local names of plants and flowers should be chronicled and also local words and expressions and their meanings, local traditions, superstitions and weather lore. Other records which would be of interest are lists of contents of parish chests and particulars of the founding of new churches, etc., and of alterations or restorations of such buildings, as records of these events are often most difficult to obtain a few years later.

In addition to records, the Hon. Secretaries of the Scheme will be glad to receive old deeds or documents which are of no further use to their owners, but which may contain matters of local interest. In this connection a large number of sixteenth century and later deeds have been deposited with the Berkshire

Branch of the Scheme. It is hoped that many other such deeds will in time be deposited instead of being destroyed, as was the common lot of many old documents in the past. The Hon. Secretaries will also be glad to hear of old title-deeds, rolls and illustrations, or measured drawings of buildings architecturally or historically interesting in private keeping, so that a register of such deeds and illustrations can be made.

The Benedictine Priory of St. Mary Magdalene, Ankerwyke, Bucks

By FREDERIC TURNER.

Ankerwyke is one of the many religious houses whose muniments, tossed aside at the 'Suppression,' have almost entirely disappeared. Hearne, writing in 1732, mentions a cartulary of the house as being then in possession of Philip Harcourt, but this too has vanished; all we can learn of the little community must be gleaned from the Bishop's Registers, the Public Records, wills and lawsuits.

The account of the house given in the Victoria History of Bucks is very much condensed, merely giving the main facts, but omitting many important details which throw considerable light upon the history of the house. It certainly seems worth while to piece together the scattered references for the sake of the information they give of life in a mediaeval nunnery.¹ Ankerwyke was one of the numerous religious houses founded in the twelfth century, and the name suggests that at a still earlier period the site was occupied by an anchorite or anchoress.

About the year 1160 Gilbert de Montfitchet, Lord of Wraybury, following the example of his father, the founder of Stratford Langthorn Abbey, Essex, founded the priory of Ankerwyke, endowing it with all the land known by that name, together with 'the assart which Richard de Bruera held, five acres of land in Wyresdebyri, and all the land of Alerburn.'²

¹ The subject as a whole has been ably dealt with by Miss Eileen Power in 'Mediaeval English Nunneries,' and I have to thank her, not only for permission to quote freely from her book, but also for help on various points connected with this article.

² Alderburn near Uxbridge.