

Reviews.

SIR HENRY LEE : AN ELIZABETHAN PORTRAIT. By SIR EDMUND K. CHAMBERS. Oxford : Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press. 15/- net.

Thirty years ago Viscount Dillon published in the Berks, Bucks, and Oxon Archaeological Journal a fairly lengthy article entitled "The Real Sir Henry Lee." It was probably intended at the time to be a prelude to an extended life of the noble author's ancestor. Such a volume, however, was not forthcoming and it has been left to another hand to tell the somewhat romantic story of one of the chief characters of the Elizabethan era. The author of the present study has undertaken the task of presenting, with the aid of Viscount Dillon's note-books and family documents long preserved at Ditchley House, a fuller study than any that has hitherto been written upon the Master Armourer of Queen Elizabeth. The result is entertaining and informative.

Born in 1533 and dying in 1611, Sir Henry Lee of Ditchley lived in an age crowded with historic figures ; in an age when to die a natural death beneath one's own roof tree was almost the exception rather than the rule among those whose military prowess or political ambition carried them into the fierce light that beat upon the throne of the Tudors. But Sir Henry Lee was one of the exceptions ; he was skilful in 'keeping his head' and managed over a fair period of time cleverly to mingle country delights with State affairs, to entertain his sovereigns, and be very human into the bargain. The author takes his subject very entertainingly from youth to age ; tells us of the rewards that came to him for service to the State ; the more intimate memorabilia concerning his family and the 'affaire' of his age with the bold Anne Vavasour. The more notable facts of the life of Sir Henry Lee are, of course, set out in the larger chronicles of the age in which he lived ; but in the present volume the author has recreated the man and has given us a pen picture that is fascinating as a biography and exceedingly readable as a story.

Here is evidence of considerable research and the book is an able contribution to the literature of one of the momentous periods in English history. There is one minor point of accuracy to which we might draw attention. In September, 1602, a Mr. Alexander was at Ditchley surveying the stable there and choosing a horse to be sent as a present from Sir Henry Lee to Cecil. Alexander is here referred to as of 'Tilehurst in Kent.' It should, of course, be Tilehurst, Berks. for the name Alexander was but an *alias* for Zinzan and the family intermarried with the Vanlores of Tilehurst in the 17th century.

E. W. D.

THE ANGLO-SAXON CEMETERY AT ABINGDON, BERKSHIRE, by
E. T. LEEDS and D. B. HARDEN. Oxford: printed for the
Visitors and sold at the Ashmolean Museum. 3s. 6d. net.

On the 23rd January, 1934, a letter was sent to the 'Oxford Mail' by one of the labourers employed in excavating a sewer trench along the middle of what has since been named Saxton Road on the Abingdon Town Council's Housing Estate. The writer of the letter, in the course of his duty, came upon the presence of burials, and with commendable foresight took the best means at his disposal to bring his discovery to a wider public. The Keeper of the Ashmolean Museum and some of his colleagues, with equal zeal, were soon on the spot and were quick to realise the possibilities of what the trench had disclosed. The result of their labours now appears in the report under notice. The site of the cemetery lies about seven hundred yards south of the river Ock, a tributary of the Thames which enters the main stream a little west of Abingdon Bridge. The discovery is of the first importance for, as the authors rightly remark in their introduction, while much is known of its great Abbey in mediæval times, little is known of Abingdon in the ages more remote. "Substantial settlements of one kind or another must have existed within the present boundaries of the town. This has already been borne out by the discovery in 1923 not only of a

Neolithic encampment, but also of Saxon occupation near by, close to the ancient fish ponds on the Radley road, as well as of Romano-British pottery and coins in the middle of the town." So far as the extent and disposition of the present cemetery are concerned the authors of the report remark that it has only been possible to excavate from a half to two-thirds of the probable site, as buildings already cover the remainder of it. Notwithstanding this, the discovery ranks with the most important in the county and the able way in which Mr. Leeds and Mr. Harden and their colleagues have carried out the work of investigation, excavation and tabulation deserves all praise. The illustrations of the finds associated with the burials are excellent and the report has been prepared with that care and thoroughness which we have now come to expect from such expert and authoritative archæologists.

E. W. D.

OXONIENSIA. Published and sold by the Oxford Architectural and Historical Society. Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.

The first number of *Oxoniensia* has been eagerly awaited and now it has appeared we hasten to extend to the sponsors of the undertaking our hearty congratulations. The purpose of *Oxoniensia* is to supply a much-needed medium for the periodical publication of papers and notes on the history and archæology of Oxford and its neighbourhood. The Editorial Committee indicate the area it is proposed to cover: "it is intended that *Oxoniensia* shall spread its limits no farther than the borders of Oxfordshire itself, except in one direction, for it will include in its territory that part of N.W. Berkshire which from the point of view of physical geography belongs properly to its sphere of influence. We confidently hope that our Berkshire neighbours, the Newbury District Field Club and the Berkshire Archæological Society, the one of which belongs rather to the S.W. of the county and the other to the S.E., will not take umbrage at this friendly invasion of an outlying part of their territory. There is room for all three in a county so large as Berkshire."

Speaking for the Berkshire Archæological Society we can say without equivocation that we welcome the appearance of what

promises to be, if the first number be an index, an exceedingly valuable addition to the periodic literature of the Societies having for their object the study and elucidation of the past story of our neighbourhood. Moreover, the area in which we are mutually concerned is classic ground for such labour and few parts of England offer so fair a field for research.

The fare which has been provided for us in the initial number of *Oxoniensia* ranges from the age of Round Barrows and Ring-Ditches to the 17th century ; includes detailed excavations of local Roman sites, notes on the churches of Bix, the Royal Visit to Oxford in 1636, and an exceedingly able and analytical study by Professor Stenton of Reading University, of the ecclesiastical organisation of pre-Conquest England, under the title of St. Frideswide. Numismatics, so far as they concern Oxford collections and county hordes, have not been neglected. The first number extends to over two hundred and twenty pages and the format is in the dignified tradition of the printed works of the University City. There are numerous illustrations. Future numbers will appear annually at Michaelmas and the price of each volume to non-subscribers to the Oxford Architectural and Historical Society is one guinea. The Hon. Secretary, Mr. D. B. Harden, M.A., who is also a member of the Editorial Committee, will be pleased to hear from those interested in the new venture if they communicate with him at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford. It need hardly be said that the future success of the undertaking will depend to a large extent upon the financial support forthcoming in its early years.

E. W. D.

READING OFFICIAL TOWN GUIDE. By ERNEST W. DORMER, F.R.Hist.S. Published in 1936 under the auspices of the Reading Chamber of Commerce, pp. 109.

This Guide includes short chapters on the history, residential, educational and industrial facilities, recreation amenities and descriptions of the churches and chapels of Reading. In the account of the History of Reading, which occupies eleven pages,

Mr. Dormer has made excellent use of the space available and has done the town justice. The chronological description of the chief events in Reading's history will afford the citizen and stranger an easy way of absorbing a brief resumé which should stimulate further enquiry on his own account. The illustrations and type are adequate ; but it seems almost inevitable nowadays that a Guide of this kind must be somewhat unrestrained in format and interleaved with numerous advertisements. The details on the folding map, reduced from the 6 inch Ordnance Survey, are just legible, but there is no scale given. The Chamber of Commerce presumably had the opportunity of producing a dignified publication and it is to be regretted that the result now before us leaves so much to be desired in this connection. Lest it be thought that this criticism is unfounded, it may be said that a more worthy guide can be produced with the aid of an adequate appreciation of a sense of values, and this is exemplified by, say, that published by the county town of East Sussex.

P. S. S.