

"THE ANTIQUITY OF BUCKINGHAMSHIRE"

A lecture with the above title was delivered at the Parish Hall, Aylesbury, on 24th October, 1928, by Mr. C. R. Peers, Chief Inspector of Ancient Monuments and Historic Buildings, H.M. Office of Works, to members of the Bucks Archaeological Society.

It is recorded of the historian William of Malmesbury that during his stay at the Abbey of Glastonbury in the third decade of the 12th century he was moved to investigate the traditions of that great Benedictine house, and its claim to be the most ancient of all the Monasteries of Britain. The results of his enquiries he set down in a book, which he called *De Antiquitate Glastoniensis Ecclesie* — "Concerning the antiquity of the Church of Glastonbury," modern writers have persisted in referring to it as the Antiquities of Glastonbury; quite a different matter, for what concerned William of Malmesbury was rather to vindicate the traditions than to enumerate the features of that house, although the fulfilment of the one task necessarily entailed some measure of performance of the other. You will, I hope, be interested to see how history repeats itself. When Sir James Berry invited me to address you on the present occasion we discussed the matter of a subject for the address, and eventually it seemed the most suitable thing to borrow from William of Malmesbury the form of his title, and to address you on the Antiquity of Buckinghamshire, but making no attempt at a catalogue of the antiquities which the county has to show. But the printer thought otherwise, and on the notice of this meeting my title appears as "The Antiquities of Buckinghamshire." In any case it happens that, in addition to what is printed in your own RECORDS, the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments and the Victoria County History have in recent years gone far to make a census of such things, and no one need now be at a loss to know, broadly speaking, what this part of England contains. It may be said that there is here

a full complement of those things which make England the pleasant land it is: pleasant is the precise epithet; we find nothing sensational, nothing of heroic scale; but on the other hand a seemingly unending quantity of evidence of long-established well-being and artistic tradition. There is nothing here to challenge comparison with the Abbeys of Yorkshire, the Castles of Wales, the earthworks of Dorset, or the prehistoric monuments of Wiltshire. For geographical and physical reasons no town in the county has become a great industrial centre; its manufactures are and have always been on a modest scale, nor does it seem likely that in our own time at least the quiet pastoral character of the land will find itself over-run and over-built by the ever-increasing swarms of Londoners in search of fresh air, or of manufacturers in search of cheap and convenient sites for their disfiguring enterprises. A fortunate case, we may say; for in the nature of things there is nothing more entirely satisfying than the sense of long continuance and gradual building up which the unspoilt parts of Britain possess to so marked a degree, and this because we are conscious that nothing but the slow lapse of time can produce it, and that, once impaired, it can never be regained. We antiquaries are at all times liable to be criticised for our delight in antiquity for its own sake, but no defence is necessary; the virtue of old age is not merely a matter of appearance, though few things are not beautified by it; but it confers a value and significance which are lacking to the best of modern work, and which are definitely necessary to a proper understanding of our own days. It is indeed no paradox to say that archæology is the science which instructs us how to deal with the problems of the present; it is at once a test and a standard of comparison, and there is no one who can afford to ignore, in dealing with his own affairs, the long experience of his predecessors, back to the beginnings of recorded time.

The Saxon settlement of the country brings in the present order of things. The scattered groups of houses develop into villages, and are the ground work

of the division into parishes—the trackways leading from one settlement to another became roads, and the lack of any central authority, such as directed the Roman surveyors, leaves visible traces in their devious courses and unexpected turns. It is only in our own day that the coming of fast traffic, on by-roads as much as on main roads, is tending to straighten and simplify them.

If we are to look for the earliest traces of man we must go to the rivers and the hills. The hunters of the early Stone Age must perforce have used these natural highways, and it is in the Thames Valley and on the Chiltern Hills that we get such scanty evidence as remains of the first inhabitants of our district.

At what period that ancient line of communication which we now call the Icknield Way took definite shape we do not know, but it follows the line of high ground which runs north-east and south-west across England from Wiltshire through Berkshire and Oxfordshire to Bucks, and on through Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire to Suffolk and Norfolk, and is marked throughout its length by more or less evident relics of those who have lived and journeyed along its line for at least the last ten thousand years. It is significant that at its northern end are the flint mines called Grimes Graves, with their evidences of occupation from late Palaeolithic times onwards, giving even for those remote days some hint of organization and intercourse. Primitive races leave little trace of themselves on the surface of the ground, and the fact that there is not much to be seen in Bucks does not prove that little exists. Open un-forested country and the gravelled valleys of streams, providing not only grass and water, but reasonably healthy conditions of life and natural highways, will contain the earliest traces of inhabitation in any country, and the chalky slopes of the Chilterns, with the springs which break at their feet, are typical of the haunts of prehistoric man.

Neolithic implements have been found distributed all over the county, and Stone Age dwellings at three places at least. These take the form of pits up to

20ft. across, roofed wigwamlike with poles and sods or brushwood, such a type as savage races use and have used all over the world, varying in character with the materials available for their construction. The people who lived in them were husbandmen, herdsmen, weavers and potters, and their burial customs imply some form of religion. Such people will make definite progress with the clearing of the land, and with them the story of our civilisation begins. There is no more fascinating pursuit than the piecing together of their records, in the certainty that the connection between them and ourselves, though long and obscure, is continuous and unbroken. Their bronze-working successors are chiefly in evidence, as far as Bucks is concerned, along the line of the Thames, where their settlements have been partly examined, but bronze implements and burials of the period occur throughout the county. Again it is only necessary to say that much more would undoubtedly be found if it were sought for, and it must be added that from this time an additional attraction is provided by the evidence of the increasing power of design in the works of man; what he produces is often beautiful, judged by any standard. While we may not make in our own country the discoveries which have set us all talking this year about Ur of the Chaldees and its expensive and unpleasant burial customs, we may find bronze weapons every bit as fine as those which were used with such effect on the Mesopotamian Court officials of the 4th millenium B.C.

As we approach the Christian era and the coming of the Romans we come within the range of what is known as late Celtic art, whose metal work, enamelling and pottery attain so high a standard of skill and beauty. Coming to us from Gaul, the art took root and developed, but was submerged by the Roman occupation, and seemed to suffer total eclipse. But it is a notable thing that it emerged once more, when all the rest of the world had forgotten it, in the 6th and 7th centuries of our era, and plays its part in early Christian ornament in Britain and Ireland for a while, finally dying out in the 8th or 9th century.

The only notable specimen of late Celtic ornament found in the county is a sword scabbard from Amerden, near Taplow, but I make here the same qualification as before, that we do not know what may really exist.

The principal visible monument of this time is the bank and ditch known as Grims' Dyke, which seems to represent a frontier line of intrusive settlers from the south and east, and crosses the county in devious fashion from Hertfordshire to Oxfordshire, and it is possible that the crosses cut in the chalk downs at Bledlow and Whiteleaf are of this date.

In Roman times Bucks, true to its traditions, was never prominent. It was crossed by two great roads, Watling Street and Akeman Street, and on the former, near Little Brickhill, there seems to have been a small town, possibly the *Magiovinium* of the Itineraries. For the rest, there were a few farm houses and country houses, whose remains have come to light from time to time, and have been more or less thoroughly examined. It is not quite clear at what date the Saxon conquest of this part of Britain took place, some opinion placing it as late as the third quarter of the 6th century. The evidence of Pagan burials is the only sure guide, and this points to a primary occupation by the West Saxons. Only one example need be referred to here, but that a very notable one, namely, the great barrow at Taplow, the *low*, in fact, which probably gave the place its name. It contained the bones of a warrior with spear and shield, whose dress had been adorned with beautifully-worked gilt clasps and buckles, with garnet inlay. By him were a glass and a drinking horn, but the most remarkable find was that of a wooden tub resting on its outstretched legs, and containing two drinking horns, two glasses, and two cups. This generous provision for the hero's future needs has only two known parallels in Britain, and was clearly a privilege accorded to few.

With the re-introduction of Christianity to the district about the middle of the 7th century the

archaeological interest changes its ground. There is nothing here to compare with the group of early churches in Kent, dating from the 7th century, though it was quite likely that there was a minster in Aylesbury before the close of that century. The oldest ecclesiastical building in the county seems to be the church at Wing, a very remarkable structure with an apsidal chancel standing over a crypt, and dating from the 10th century or earlier, and beside it there are only three churches of pre-Conquest date, at Iver, Hardwick, and Lavendon, all of which may belong to the early years of the 11th century.

From the end of the 11th century begins the series of parish churches which here, as in most English counties, form the richest part of our historical and artistic inheritance. It is beyond the limits of this address to refer to them in detail; their many admirable qualities will be well known to you, and if we must say here, as in other contexts, that other counties can show more splendid buildings, that is only in keeping with the *aurea mediocritas* to which I have already referred more than once as a characteristic of Bucks. It is not possible to point, in any period, to architectural details which can be called local, except perhaps in the 12th century hour glass fonts, of which Aylesbury has one typical example.

The monastic houses of the county, never of great importance, have suffered so considerably in their buildings that only in one case, that of the Augustinian Priory of Chetwode, does any part of a monastic church remain in good state, and in this instance it owes its preservation to the fact that it became parochial in the 15th century. It is a delightful piece of 13th-century work, the east end of the canon's church, and has the additional attraction of some 13th and 14th century glass. The western and part of the southern range of the cloister of Notley Abbey, a house of Augustinian Canons, and the eastern range of Burnham Abbey, an Augustinian Nunnery, are the only other considerable pieces of monastic building. The plan of the Benedictine Nunnery of Little Marlow was verified by excavation

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some 25 years ago, but if anything exists of the plan of Luffield, Ravenstone, Bradwell, Ivinghoe, or Ankerwick, it has yet to be found. The same may be said of the Cistercian houses of Biddlesden and Medmenham, and the Cluniac Priory of Tickford,

The 16th century plan of Chetwode Priory, in the circumstances, is a document of much value, and the suppression survey of Tickford has been lately used in the *Bucks Records* as the basis of a conjectural setting out of its buildings.

If the monasteries have fared badly, the castles of Bucks have fared worse, having practically nothing of their buildings to show. There are some twenty-two sites with mounds or ditches, or both, which serve to recall the defensive works of the Middle Ages, but as far as military architecture is concerned the page is blank. The 14th century gate house at Boarstall, the only remains of Boarstall House, is the single fortified building of importance in the county, and in any case is rather to be classed with domestic rather than military architecture.

The earlier defensive sites—that is those which may claim a prehistoric origin, are some twenty in number. In them much may be hidden, and they are most emphatically worthy of examination. Of late years work has been undertaken, I am glad to see, on several of them. The largest of all, Bulstrode Camp, near Gerrards Cross, containing some 22 acres within its lines, has yielded some evidence of occupation in the early Iron Age, but no signs of settled inhabitation have been found. Danesborough Camp at Wavendon has shown evidence of native occupation in Roman times, while the investigations of the remarkably planned enclosure of Norbury Camp, and of the Danes' Ditches, near Medmenham, have produced no clear indications of date. I hope these excavations will continue, in spite of the fact that the actual discoveries with which they are rewarded are normally few and far between. Field work is a primary necessity of archaeology, and the cumulative results soon become important, though individual sites may prove

Somewhat barren. In such things we deal with, evidence at first hand, and theories are put to a test which they often do not survive. It is only necessary to recall to you the revolution in our knowledge of Stonehenge since systematic excavations were begun there some fifteen years ago.

In Britain no monument is more famous than Stonehenge, and none has been written about at greater length or with greater inaccuracy. That we shall ever know all its story is hardly likely, but its salient features, and, what is more valuable, its relation to other monuments, are becoming clearer year by year. The causewayed circles, with which it has some affinity, now recognised or implying neolithic origin, were practically unknown till recent times, but are now coming to light in different parts of the country. Nothing is more possible than that there may be such things on the Chiltern Hills, hitherto overlooked. Who will set out to look for them ?

I must take one more item in the list, and that, in point of bulk, the most important, namely, the domestic buildings, whose humble origin in the later Stone Age we have already seen. Owing, no doubt, to the normal use of timber in their construction, the dwellings of the Saxons have not come down to us in the same way as an appreciable number of their churches have done. But though this is so, some of our small mediaeval buildings show the survival of an infinitely ancient tradition. As the prehistoric hut was roofed with leaning poles covered with some sort of thatch, so the same construction applied to a rectangular building results in the pairs of leaning timbers, which are still called crucks in the North of England, and form the framework of many old cottages and barns today. An example from Cuddington shows how this simple form develops, by the addition of uprights at the sides and a pent roof above, making room for an upper storey. The space between each pair of crucks is a bay, normally 15ft. in length, and old houses will often be found described as so many bays, as units of building. And just as in the primitive monasteries the inmates were

housed separately in a number of simple cottages of this sort, with larger separate buildings for common use, so among these little houses there developed larger and wider ones for the wealthy man and his house-hold, and the wooden hall with its central hearth and roof carried on tall wooden posts was evolved. Nothing of this sort of an earlier date than the Norman Conquest has survived, though the literary evidence for them is plentiful, but remains of more than one 12th century wooden hall are to be found in England. In Bucks there is at any rate one specimen and a fine one, dating from the end of the 13th century, of a wooden hall with aisles at the Savoy at Denham, and there may be recognised remains of others. Of aisle-less halls with open roofs there are a fair number, in various stages of preservation, but seeing that the inconveniences of an old-fashioned arrangement are less readily tolerated in a dwelling house than elsewhere, it is not surprising that the percentage of survival is small.

Mediaeval houses, none the less, carry the evidences of their ancestry in unmistakable fashion, and anything like a breakaway from tradition, a following of individual ideas, is at all times an exceptional thing, and the new fashions of the later 16th century never attain to a real break in the sequence. Perspective will always show in the essential continuity in such matters, and it is only because our own times are too close to our eyes that we are inclined to believe that we have broken with tradition and are following new and original ways. Indeed, a consideration of our place in the history of the world cannot fail to show us that if the time for such a departure may ever come it is very far from having arrived at present. The function of archaeology with regard to contemporary affairs I have already put before you, and the conclusion is infinitely strengthened by even so summary a review of the facts as I have tried to set down. We are part of the antiquity of Bucks, and can freely recognise the fact, without waiting for the verdict of our descendants. We are, whether we will or no, playing our part in a long sequence, having the records of our

forerunners more or less clearly before our eyes, and being as intimately concerned with them as with what we are doing¹ and with what we leave for our successors to do. Archaeology, rightly understood, is everybody's business, and it is not as an agreeable recreation that it should be regarded, but as a necessary part of our equipment, one which requires just as careful training as any other work or profession to which we may devote ourselves. The fact is indeed so obvious that it is generally overlooked: it may therefore be permissible to devote a short time to its practical consideration. As I have said, we are part of a sequence, and one of such personal concern to ourselves that our duty is twofold; it is ours to preserve and ours to continue. Organised action is essential, and your presence to-day shows that this condition can be satisfied. Further, there has grown up, in the lifetime of many of us, a conception of our corporate duty in such matters which has given a practical form to the part which the State can take. Certain powers have been taken under the Ancient Monuments Acts, and certain financial provisions made, for the preservation of our monumental history : not enough to satisfy the requirements of the case, but enough to begin with. The outlines of these powers are familiar to most of you, but for the sake of clearness they may be shortly set down here. It being recognised that it is of national importance that the monuments of our history should be preserved, for the purposes of administration the monuments can be dealt with in two classes—those which belong to the State and those which do not. The first class is clearly the State's own affair: such monuments must be maintained by 'the State, on the same grounds as any other State property must be maintained, and the Monuments Acts only serve to emphasise their claim to maintenance. Official provision must be made for this service, and the private citizen has in this respect only that part to play which is assigned to him in all public functions—that is, the privilege of paying for them. To deal with monuments not in possession of the State—that is, those belonging to public bodies or private individuals, a

different procedure is necessary. In the first place, we must make up our minds which these monuments are—that is, which of them may properly be regarded as of national importance. The function of making a list of such monuments is assigned, by the Act, to an Advisory Board, consisting of representatives of certain official and unofficial bodies, with the addition of specially qualified individuals, without definite restriction as to number. To make this list time will be required, not only on account of the number of monuments which may be considered fit for inclusion, but because it is essential to keep in touch with public opinion in the matter. The Act passed in 1913, and, seeing that it had to be left practically in suspense during the war, has had some 10 years of active life so far. The number of monuments now on the scheduled list is between 2,000 and 3,000, but before we can say that the great majority of important monuments are scheduled this number will have to be greatly added to. These monuments are, as it were, certified, and under a degree of statutory protection; a few of them can be, and have been, taken over by the State, and repaired and maintained from public funds. This select band increases slowly year by year, and will, I hope, long continue to do so; but it can never form more than a very small fraction of the whole lot. They are, of course, entirely and permanently safeguarded; there are some 200 of them to-day. The rest are only potentially protected; any determined attempt to remove or damage them can only be defeated by a cumbrous and rather uncertain process known as a Preservation Order, and this order becomes inoperative after 18 months unless confirmed by Parliament. But till more effective legislation can be obtained this must serve, and it is at any rate better than nothing. We are in the infancy of the organisation of the science of taking care of our hereditary possessions. Moreover, it must be remembered that such powers as exist apply only to certain classes of monuments. No house which is inhabited and no ecclesiastical building which is in use can be protected by the Act; that is to say, that the vast

majority of our mediæval monuments have no statutory protection whatever. So much for the law; but this is not the whole story: this is in fact where the private person comes in. In addition to the long-established archaeological societies, whose influence is happily ever on the increase, the growth of protective organizations is a notable feature of modern times. Apart from their occasional successes in special cases, the real achievement of such bodies is the formation of public opinion. The force of such opinion has led, to give one instance, to the creation of Diocesan Advisory Boards, which have greatly improved the lot of our parish churches; it is not too much to say that the calamities that in our own lifetimes have been inflicted on so many of them are less and less likely to recur now. It is much to be wished that the same could be said in regard to the houses of our smaller towns and villages. If there is any country in the world which possesses such an array of delightful and picturesque towns and villages as England does. I have not been fortunate enough to discover it. We see them wherever we go, and there is up to now no sort of machinery by which they can be protected. In some of our larger towns, such as Norwich, societies are springing up whose express purpose it is to keep an eye on such buildings, but this can hardly be done in the case of our villages. And yet it most surely needs to be done.

They preserve for us in no uncertain form the unwritten history of the countryside for the last 1,400 or 1,500 years, from the settlements of the Saxons to the villages which succeeded them, in which the village churches came to be built, near the big house, if the landowner lived in his village. • The scattered farms became hamlets, and form outlying parts of the village, and their seemingly haphazard positions retain the memory of the small personal influences which are otherwise so soon forgotten as one generation succeeds to another.

One more thing, and I will not make any further demands on your patience. We have been considering what can be said of the antiquity of Bucks, and

may say that in hardly any department of prehistoric or historic archaeology is the county to be found lacking. There is ample scope for investigation and discovery, and there is ample scope for study and for preservation. As far as the State is concerned, the record is a modest one. Only one monument, and that belonging to the State, namely, the house of Chequers, is maintained from public funds. There are nine scheduled monuments: the Whiteleaf and Bledlow Crosses, Oholesbury, and Pulpit Hill Camps, the barrow at Thornborough, the Cop mound at Bledlow, the Mount at Princes Risborough, and the bridges at Ickford and Thornborough.

That list can and should be increased, but in the meanwhile the matter remains in your hands. The eleven volumes of the *Records of Buck* must count as a notable achievement in fostering public interest in the history of the county and its monuments, but it need not be said that there is scope for more, and if, as I hope, you may agree with me that archaeology is not a mere pastime, but one of the necessary sciences, further material will be forthcoming and further investigations undertaken in the very fertile fields, which are your own especial province.