

THE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT IN ENGLAND OF THE SCIENCE OF ARCHAEOLOGY.

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS BY LT.-COL. J. B. KARSLAKE, M.A., F.S.A.

4TH MAY, 1936.

THE Science of Archaeology which deals with the study of the remains of ancient human activity, may fairly be said in this country to have begun with John Leland in the 16th century. A member of All Souls, Oxford, he had travelled extensively in Europe visiting and studying the centres of early civilization.

Sometime prior to 1530 he had been appointed Librarian to Henry VIII and in 1533 he was given the office of King's Antiquary, an office which he was the first, as well as the last, to hold. His commission empowered him to search for English antiquities in all the libraries of all cathedrals, abbeys, priories, and colleges, and in all places where records, writings and secrets of antiquity were deposited. Armed with these powers, he made a tour of England which lasted six years, not only examining manuscripts and records but also seeking and recording all monuments of the Roman, Saxon or Danish periods then in existence.

Up to the days of Leland monuments of the past were chiefly valued as a possible source of treasure, and many were destroyed in the search for it. Even kings did not disdain this form of treasure hunting.

There is extant a warrant of Henry III in the year 1234 issued to the Duke of Cornwall to cause diggings to be made in the barrows of Cornwall to discover the treasure in them. In like manner as had been done in the barrows of the Isle of Wight. To judge by modern experience, the hunt could not have been very profitable in precious metals. And this destruction of barrows for the sake of their supposed contents persisted until quite recent years. Canon Greenwell in the middle of last century deploras how many barrows have been destroyed by shepherds and others from motives of mere idle curiosity, or in the delusive hope of finding treasure. Still more have been destroyed, he says, under the influence of a curiosity by persons indeed of better education, but who have thought that enough was gained if they found an urn to occupy a vacant space in the entrance hall, or get a necklace or a flint arrow-point for the lady of the house to show with other trifles to her guests requiring amusement. The wonder only is that any have survived for modern scientific investigation.

And barrows were not alone in suffering from the seekers after spoil. Building material, especially Roman tiles and bricks, were

highly prized by the early builders, and many were the remains of Roman structures still standing in mediaeval times which were recklessly destroyed for the sake of what they could provide for other buildings.

It is refreshing to turn from this chronicle of destruction to at least one attempt at preservation.

Influenced perhaps by the work of Leland under Henry VIII's patronage, his niece, Mary Queen of Scots, showed a spirit in advance of her age with regard to monuments.

For when she was informed of the discovery of Roman remains at Inveresk, she issued instructions to the local baillees to take heed and attention that the monument of great antiquity recently found be not demolished or broken down.

Some half century after Leland we have William Camden—one of our most distinguished antiquaries. Of obscure parentage, Camden managed to get to Oxford, and afterwards became first a Master and then Head Master of Westminster School.

A great historian, Camden determined, to use his own words, "to restore Britain to her Antiquities and her Antiquities to Britain."

Like Leland, he toured the whole of England and Wales in search of records and monuments of the past, and the better to perform his task he acquired a knowledge both of the Welsh and Anglo-Saxon languages. The results of his journeys he published in his book, *Britannia*, which first appeared in 1586.

Camden freely admitted to have copied the methods of Leland but while, he said, Leland had spent six years, he had spent six times that number of years in the study of antiquity. He recorded and surveyed every monument of antiquity he could discover in each county not only of England and Wales, but of Scotland and Ireland as well. We are told that his book met with so much applause and commendation from the learned that they knew no title great enough for the author.

No less than six editions were published in his lifetime, and fresh editions appeared from time to time until the end of the 18th century.

Only one antiquary of any repute belongs to the 17th century—John Aubrey, a native, like so many other antiquaries, of Wiltshire, where he owned a large estate.

He has left us good descriptions of Stonehenge as it existed in his day and also of Avebury, which hitherto seems to have been either unknown or unheeded.

But it was not until the foundation of the Society of Antiquaries in 1718 that a revival commenced in the study of Antiquity, and Archaeology began to be recognised as a scientific pursuit.

Dr. William Stukeley was one of the original founders of the Society, and its first Secretary, an office which he held for many years.

Following in the footsteps of Leland and Camden, he also made an archaeological tour of Great Britain. The account of "the antiquities and remarkable curiosities" he observed he published under the title of *Itinerarium Curiosum* in 1724. The narrative of his journeys he illustrated with careful plans and sketches of the sites of the Roman and medieval remains he visited in order, as he says, to better convey an idea than written descriptions which often not at all, oftener not sufficiently, explain them.

Later, between 1723 and 1740, he made a close study of Avebury and Stonehenge, of both of which he published a detailed survey with many plans and drawings. To both these great monuments he assigned a Druidical origin, a character which still in consequence attaches to them in the minds of many persons of the present day.

Stukeley was not content with mere surface observations of ancient monuments. He undertook some work of excavation on the remains of Roman villas in Lincolnshire, where he ultimately settled—one of the first antiquaries to use the spade in his investigations of the past.

But it is claimed for Dr. Mortimer to have been the first to adopt modern scientific exploration by means of excavation in 1730. Mortimer was the Secretary of the Royal Society, which at that time looked somewhat askance at the growing influence of the younger Society of Antiquaries. He undertook the examination of the numerous grave mounds of early Saxon date which at that time were so numerous on the downs at Chartham in Kent, and made a detailed report on the weapons and other objects he found in the graves to his Society.

His excavations had been watched when a boy by Bryan Fausset, and who later in life, between 1757 and 1773, continued Mortimer's work on Saxon cemeteries in Kent, in the course of which he opened and recorded with scientific care and admirable detail many hundred burials. A rival antiquary, the Rev. James Douglas, was at the same time occupied in the study of Saxon barrows and cemeteries in the same county. Douglas's account of his work was published under the title of *Nenia Britannica* or *A Sepulchal History of Britain*, 1793—an account which for the detail of his observation and the beauty and accuracy of his drawings of the objects he found could scarcely be surpassed at the present day.

His work must always be considered one of the classics of British Archaeology, especially in regard to early Saxon history.

Two prominent figures in British archaeology appear in the early part of the 19th century—Samuel Lysons and Sir Richard Colt Hoare.

Lysons, who belonged to Gloucestershire, was Director of the Society of Antiquaries from 1798 to 1809. He took a special interest in the Roman villas which about this period were being frequently disclosed by the plough, partly no doubt due to the improved agriculture and deeper cultivation practised.

These accidental discoveries he followed up at considerable expense for many years. His greatest work was the complete uncovering of the great villa at Woodchester in Gloucestershire between the years 1793-6, perhaps the best and largest villa ever discovered in this country.

Besides Woodchester he examined and recorded many villas in Gloucestershire, Dorset, Wilts, and especially the well-known villa at Bignor in Sussex. Of all these villas he made careful and accurate plans and drawings. More especially the many and beautiful pavements found in many of the villas he copied with minute care in coloured drawings, which he published in three volumes, and has so preserved them for future generations, after alas! in most cases the originals have been destroyed.

But he can scarcely be described as an excavator in the sense in which we use the term to-day. His object was to remove the soil covering the walls and floors of a building as expeditiously as possible—using often the services of the local farmer and his labourers to do the work, without any skilled supervision. On one occasion, we read, that he even made use of a working party of militiamen from a neighbouring camp. Consequently but little account was taken of pottery, coins, or other small objects. They were seldom recorded or preserved, and consequently much evidence for the date and character of Roman villa life has been lost for ever.

Sir Richard Colt Hoare was principally interested in the numerous barrows which covered the downs of his native Wiltshire. Inspired by the collections of urns, flint and bronze implements already found in them by his friend William Cunnington, he decided to make as complete survey as possible of the barrows of Wiltshire.

In this work he had the assistance of Cunnington, and between them they chronicled the position and contents of many hundreds of barrows. Hoare, alone, it is said, opened some four hundred in the course of his excavations.

Both he and Cunnington followed the same system in opening barrows. This was to sink a hole or section in the centre of a barrow in the hope of finding an urn or implements of stone or bronze.

Broken pottery or other fragmentary relics as well as the bones of the buried bodies were shovelled away with the soil and left unrecorded. He even tells how in one instance the skull and bones of an interment were found in so wonderful state of preservation

that they could be thrown long distances without breaking. In consequence much was left unrecorded and even unnoticed.

This is scarcely to be wondered at when he records that in one month, July 1809, he opened and examined no less than eleven barrows near Winterbourne. The results of his work he published in 1812 in two magnificent volumes entitled *Ancient Wiltshire*, illustrated with beautifully executed engravings of such of the pottery, implements and ornaments as he fortunately recovered intact.

While, however, Hoare was chiefly interested in prehistoric barrows of the Stone and Bronze ages, he did not neglect the Roman period, especially as evidenced by the roads of the South of England which he carefully surveyed and described. And in our own county he made very accurate drawings of Roman villas discovered between 1823 and 1827 at Thruxton, Bramdean and Crondall.

Sir Richard Colt Hoare was not merely satisfied to record the various objects he found in the course of his digging. He sought to deduce from them the character of the life and surroundings of the various peoples in whose burial places they had been deposited. His motto was "to speak from facts not theory." "I shall describe to you," he says, "what we have found, what we have seen; in short, I shall tell you a plain unvarnished tale, and draw from it such conclusions as shall appear not only reasonable, but even uncontradictable." Here we have the true spirit of the antiquary.

And even if Colt Hoare explored barrows at a rate which may shock modern explorers, nevertheless the time which he gave to examining a barrow compares favourably with some of his successors. Mr. Thomas Bateman, who worked on the barrows of Derbyshire in the forties of last century, frequently opened two or three in a day, and Mr. Charles Warne in Dorsetshire in the sixties claims on one occasion to have actually opened six in a single day, which feat he seemed to have looked upon in the light of a good day's bag.

While exploring barrows occupied the time and energy of many antiquaries in southern and central England during the greater part of last century, remains of Roman civilization were not altogether neglected. Lysons, as has been said, examined and described many Roman villas—and after his death many more were discovered and excavated by various persons, some qualified for the work, but alas! in many instances by those who were not, with the result that in most instances very little evidence of them has been preserved, and subsequent exposure and neglect has destroyed most of what was uncovered.

In the middle of last century Mr. Wright could account for no less than a hundred Roman villas that had been recorded, and of which to-day we know scarcely anything of value.

But besides villas early in last century it began to be recognized that the great Roman Wall in Northumberland required something more than the survey made by Horsley in 1732, and his determination of the names of the stations by reference to the 5th century Notitia, and this want was supplied by Mr. John Clayton whose estate of Chesters included the remains of the Roman station of Cilurnum. Clayton has been well described as the Nestor of Northern Antiquities, and his careful description of his excavations of Cilurnum in 1843 and other places on the line of the wall for the first time reveals the details of Roman military architecture and engineering in Britain.

But little was known of the civil life in the towns of Roman Britain until in 1865 excavations were begun by the Rev. J. G. Joyce on the site of Silchester in our own county.

He continued his excavations until 1873, during which time he uncovered the Forum and Basilica, about six adjacent houses, and the principal gates. These he described with commendable accuracy of detail in several papers read to the Society of Antiquaries. He also kept in manuscript his *Journal of Excavation*, which he illustrated with precise drawings of the pavements and other objects found. This passed after his death into the hands of a bookseller in Winchester, but by good fortune was rescued and deposited with the great Silchester collection in Reading Museum.

Subsequently between the years 1890 and 1909 the whole site was scientifically and systematically excavated by the Society of Antiquaries.

To Canon Greenwell, who worked on the barrows principally in the East Riding Wolds of Yorkshire in the middle of last century, must be ascribed the credit of having introduced a far more scientific method of examining these priceless storehouses of the cultural objects of early man, few of which still remain for present day examination. Not only was his method of excavation far more thorough than that of his predecessors, but he also paid special attention to the preservation of the skeletal remains interred; which previous diggers had almost entirely neglected. Assisted by an eminent anatomist, Professor Rolleston, full details were recorded of the cranial measurements and length of limb bones in order to determine the racial characters of the Neolithic, Bronze and Iron Age inhabitants of these islands.

His *British Barrows* must always remain the standard work on the sepulchral methods practised not only in Yorkshire, but throughout Great Britain in prehistoric ages.

Lieut.-General Pitt Rivers, perhaps the greatest archaeologist and anthropologist England has ever produced, was a pupil of Canon Greenwell.

After a distinguished career in the Army he inherited in 1880 an extensive estate on the borders of Dorset and Wilts, which included the downland of Cranborne Chase, which contained extensive indications of settlements and burial places of prehistoric Roman and Saxon origin. Here he had the fullest scope for that capacity for antiquarian research for which he had already become famous—research which had extended from the Palaeolithic implements of the Thames gravels to the exploration of British camps on the Sussex Downs.

Settled at his house at Rushmore, he determined to devote his life and an ample fortune to the investigation of the numerous monuments of the past upon his estates. Himself a keen and scientific excavator, he gathered round him a staff of experts in every branch of research; excavators, surveyors, and draughtsmen, to ensure that no detail of his work might be unrecorded; commencing with barrow digging and going on to the exploration of habitation sites of the Stone, Bronze, and Roman period, including the great Dyke of post-Roman construction which intersected his property.

He never commenced an exploration which he did not thoroughly complete. He never neglected the most trivial relics, and every object, no matter however apparently unimportant, he figured and described. Contoured plans and other surveys were prepared by his staff with the utmost accuracy of every monument both before, during, and after excavation, and scale models were a conspicuous part of every work. The results of over thirty years' work were related in four magnificent volumes containing plans and sections of every site excavated, with drawings to scale of every relic found. These volumes constitute the most complete record and guide to a vast series of cultural objects illustrating the life of prehistoric and Roman Britain. Fortunate is the antiquary who may possess them.

I can only conclude this too brief account of Pitt Rivers' work by quoting the concluding sentence of his *Memoirs*, written by his principal coadjutor, Mr. St. George Gray: General Pitt Rivers not only solved vast archaeological and ethnological problems; but by his researches he raised new ones to be explained by the scientists of the 20th century. His methods, precision and exhaustive minuteness in archaeological field-work might well be designated in future the Pitt Rivers School of British Archaeology.

And here, with the dawn of the 20th century, which Pitt Rivers just lived to see, we may fitly conclude our survey of archaeological history. The remarkable progress of the science and the practice of excavation in recent years is before our eyes, and the moral we must draw from the past is that only those well versed in the science of archaeology must venture henceforth to disturb the secrets of the past still guarded in our soil.