

EARLY DAYS OF THE HAMPSHIRE FIELD CLUB.

By DR. J. P. WILLIAMS-FREEMAN.

OUR Editor has asked me to send him some account of the earliest days of The Hampshire Field Club, which was founded in the year 1885. I was, however, not an original member, only joining it in 1906, the year it came of age, though in its earliest days I used to hear a great deal of its proceedings from friends who were lucky enough to be able to join in its meetings.

Looking through the first two or three volumes of its *Proceedings*, each containing then, as now, three or more years' work, the first thing that strikes one is the enthusiasm and activity of its early members. A large proportion were keen scientific men, many of them working at their professions, and nearly all of whom seem to have had absorbing hobbies which they could discuss with their fellow members. The result is that the first three or four years of the *Proceedings* largely consists of lists, lists of the birds of Hampshire, of the fishes, and of every kind of animal from badgers to the minutest insects, while the botanical side of Nature is covered by lists and descriptions of the finest and rarest trees down to the lowliest of mosses and fungi. The Committee wisely published all and sundry of these lists, well knowing that dull as they are to the ignorant, it is on such observations that every biological outdoor science has been founded.

Nor were the inanimate sciences neglected. The Geologists watched and recorded everything that turned up in the numerous cuttings and diggings that were so common in that active period, and indeed there must have been little of scientific value that escaped the notice of the enthusiasts in the early days of the Hampshire Field Club.

Architecture was naturally a leading study. Every building with which man has enriched the earth, from Prehistoric Earthworks (the first list of forty-four camps was published by Mr. Shore in 1885) to any modern work of importance, was studied and reported on, chiefly by Mr. N. C. H. Nisbett, A.R.I.B.A., of Winchester, a very early member; and in more than one case buildings were rescued from destruction and decay. Meanwhile the slow growth of Archaeology as a science was fostered and encouraged.

In glancing through the early numbers of the *Proceedings* one is surprised at the number of subjects that receive notice in the *Proceedings*, such as analyses of drinking water, investigations into the composition of Malm rock, and frequent reports on Geological

Sections in cuttings are recorded. One has to remind oneself that fifty years ago popular handbooks on elementary science were none too common.

Our County was fairly rich in Scientific Institutions, and I should judge above the average in the men who staffed them. The Hartley Institute and at least one other institution in Southampton devoted themselves entirely to scientific teaching. Many of the clergy had their scientific hobbies and the landed gentry had an interest in the scientific management of their estates, even if they had been deprived of any touch of science in their schooling!

In the early days of the Club all the officials were men connected with science. Our first President was Professor de Chaumont, F.R.S., of Netley Hospital. He was a man of European and American reputation and the greatest living authority on Hygiene.

Our Treasurer was W. E. Darwin, F.G.S., a son of the great Charles Darwin. His hobby was palaeolithic flints. Our Organising Secretary was T. W. Shore, F.G.S., F.C.S., Head of the Hartley Institution, and our General Secretary was W. Dale, F.G.S., who led us at all meetings and was responsible for their arrangement. He was a strong character who knew the country well and had all its contents at his fingers ends—and woe to any one of us who did not come to heel at the sound of his whistle or delayed the meeting by losing his way!

The Editor of our *Proceedings* was the Reverend G. W. Minns, F.S.A., kindly and helpful to everybody who wanted his help and who devoted much of his time to us up to a ripe old age.

The County was divided into eleven Districts, each with a Local Secretary who had a seat on the General Committee and could keep the Club informed of points of local interest. All of them were keen out-of-door men, and in every district there was someone to whom one could go and get help and advice in cases of difficulty, and of course membership of the Club brought many kindred spirits together.

A great source of strength to the Club was the interest taken in it by members of the staff of Netley Hospital. Most of the Professors and their families became members, indeed Professor de Chaumont whom I have already mentioned was the Club's first President, and his death at the end of his first year was one of the Club's greatest blows. The whole atmosphere of Netley Hospital was one that as a very near neighbour I know to have been in the greatest sympathy with such a Club as ours.

Though I did not become a member of the Club till 1906, I soon felt that its early enthusiasm for pure science was on the wane, and that the more popular subjects—Natural History, County History, Architecture, Archaeology and Folk-Lore—generally were the chief interest of the new members. Looking at the lists, one

finds more simple country residents who are chiefly interested in out-of-door pursuits and in the surroundings which excite their curiosity.

This to my mind is all to the good. Pure science is not now so rare and the standard of knowledge is higher. Photography and reproduction in all its forms make explanations easier and more accessible, and year by year the demand for time increases. Excavations which formerly took a day or two's "dig" now extend over weeks and require specialists at every turn as our knowledge increases.

By all means let us broaden and extend our interest to cover all the knowledge, great and small, that is to be found in the "Field."