

Report of the Curator of Taunton Castle Museum for the year ending December 31st, 1906.

MUCH that was said in the Curator's Report for 1905 applies equally to the present year, and it will be needless to repeat what was then said about the development of the Museum and the requirements necessary in order that the whole of the Society's collections should be exhibited in a creditable manner. The collections of archæological remains and general antiquities are fast overcrowding the space available in the Norman Keep; and the consequence is that many series of objects have to be temporarily exhibited in the Great Hall—the room intended mainly, if not entirely, for the Society's Natural History collections.

Many of the specimens illustrating the arts of mankind (chiefly from foreign parts) are not exhibited at all owing to want of space. Some of these objects were badly shown in unsuitable and antiquated cases in the round tower room upstairs, but, since the arrival of the "Charles Tite Collection of Somerset Books," they have for the most part been removed. This room was repaired and re-decorated last summer, before being fitted with two large bookcases to contain Mr. Tite's books.

I wish to put on record a fact already known to the Committee, viz., that at the present time at least one-quarter of the Society's Museum specimens cannot be properly exhibited for want of space, and many have had to be put out of sight altogether. The only remedy for this state of things would be to devote the other rooms belonging to the Castle proper to the purposes of the Museum, as soon as the Society's income can bear the extra expenditure.

As will be seen from the following pages, the Museum collections are, chiefly by donations, increasing at a considerable rate, and with the other interests of the Society to attend to, with an increasing number of members and consequently a larger amount of official correspondence, I find in some seasons but a small proportion of my time remaining for the re-arrangement of the Society's existing collections. However, a considerable amount of miscellaneous work has been done this year, especially in the identifying and ticketing of the series of pottery dating from the Bronze Age down to the present day.

Colonel Bramble, in memory of his Presidency of the Society during 1905-6, has presented to the Museum a handsome show-case for the proper exhibition of the coloured "Elton ware" presented by Sir Edmund Elton, Bart., four years ago. On hearing of this Sir Edmund at once kindly offered to the Society forty-four picked pieces of his newer pottery—"the Elton metallic and lustre ware"—an offer, needless to say, cordially accepted. This second series is now exhibited in another ebonized case to match the above-mentioned one; the cost being defrayed by the sale of a portion of the Brereton collotypes of Somerset Church Towers. From the "Brereton fund" two more similar cases have been ordered for the Great Hall, one of which will be devoted to the Society's collection of Somerset and Bristol pottery, chiefly glazed pottery of the XVII and XVIII Centuries.

The wall-case in the Great Hall, formerly partly filled by "Elton ware," has now been utilized for the exhibition of a large loan collection of Pewter collected by Mr. T. Charbonnier between Bristol and Barnstaple. It is probably one of the finest collections of the kind in the south of England; and it is hoped that a catalogue of it may be printed.

Mr. W. B. Broadmead, of Enmore Castle, has recently presented to the Museum a collection of ceremonial brass staff-heads (chiefly Somerset), formerly carried by village clubs,

and generally called "club-brasses" by collectors. They are being nicely mounted for exhibition.

In the spring of the year the Curator's illustrated paper on the "Norris Collection of Antiquities" was reprinted to serve as a Guide to that collection, and is now on sale at 4d. Within the last few weeks another illustrated Guide Book has been published at the same price, viz., "A Short History of Taunton Castle," by the Rev. D. P. Alford, M.A.

A year or two ago it was resolved to reduce the admission to the Museum on Thursday afternoons to 1d. (Taunton Early Closing Day), in the hope of attracting a larger number of townspeople to the Castle. As there has been little or no increase in the attendances, and as the receipts from this source have been somewhat diminished, the Committee has decided that the admission fee shall, after January 1st, 1907, be 2d. every day, except on Saturdays, when visitors will be admitted for 1d. as usual.

The following is a list of the monthly attendance of visitors to the Museum and Library for the year just completed.

	No. of Members.	Total Visitors.		No. of Members.	Total Visitors.
Jan. ...	63	338	July ...	93	535
Feb. ...	88	314	Aug. ...	108	1201
Mar. ...	100	412	Sept. ...	109	780
Apr. ...	104	558	Oct. ...	141	654
May ...	101	594	Nov. ...	119	454
June ...	110	584	Dec. ...	112	475
				1248	6889

In comparing these figures with last year it is seen that there has been a decrease in each month of 1906, except for October and November. There has been, however, very little difference during May, July, and August; and the attendance during the Christmas holidays, 1906, has been the greatest on record.

H. ST. GEORGE GRAY.

December 31st, 1906.