

Opening of the Wyndham Galleries, Somerset County Museum, Taunton Castle

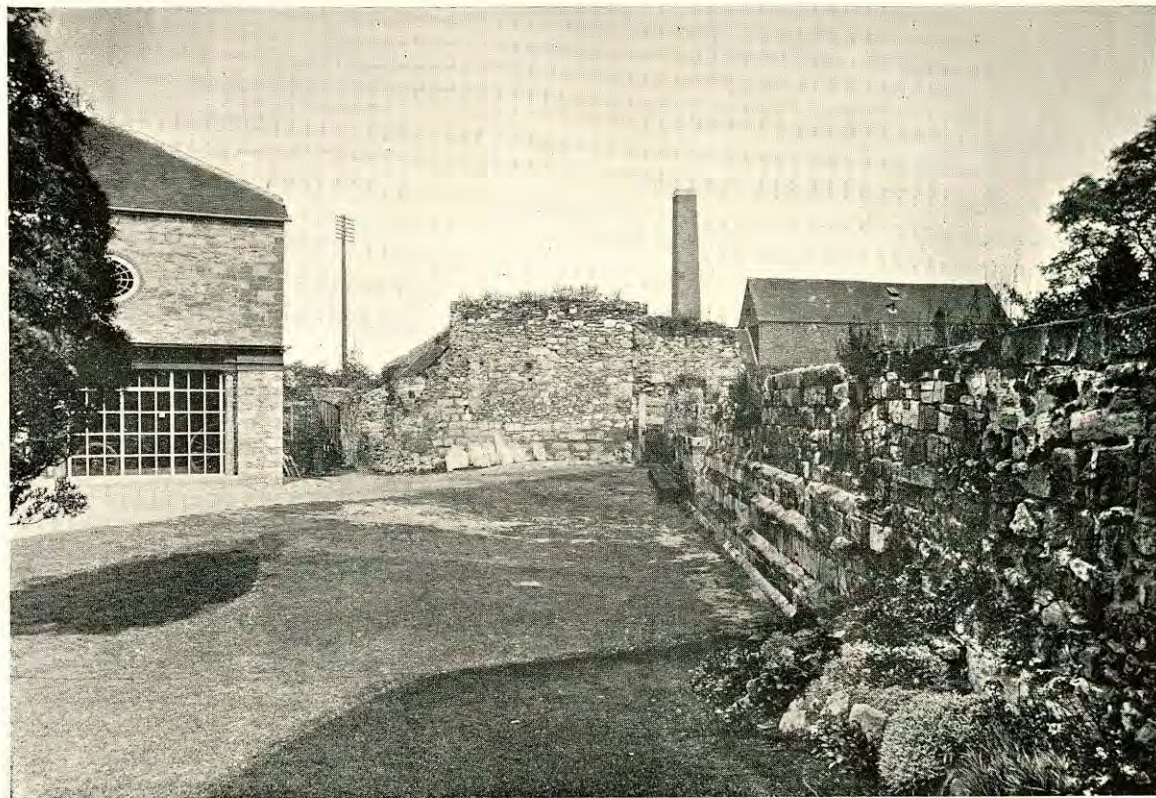
(Plates I and II)

THOSE present at the opening of the new Wyndham Galleries at the Somerset County Museum, Taunton Castle, on 3 October 1934 could fully appreciate the spacious two-storeyed addition to the Museum which has been given to the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society by Mr. William Wyndham, president for 1934-35.

Mr. Wyndham formally opened the new wing, and among those who spoke and congratulated the Society on this latest expression of Mr. Wyndham's generosity (he had now given to the Society buildings, etc., costing nearly £12,000) were Sir Frederick Kenyon, G.B.E., K.C.B., Director and Chief Librarian of the British Museum from 1909 to 1930 and President of the Society of Antiquaries, Dr. Cyril Fox, F.S.A., Director of the National Museum of Wales and President of the Museums Association, the Right Hon. Sir Matthew Nathan, G.C.M.G., High Sheriff of Somerset, and Mr. H. St. George Gray, F.S.A., the Society's Curator and Assistant-Secretary.

The proceedings began in the Lecture Hall built by Mr. Wyndham in 1927, the chair being taken by the Very Rev. Prior E. Horne, F.S.A. (Chairman of Council).

Sir Frederick Kenyon first made allusion to Mr. Wyndham's new benefaction, saying 'it is an extraordinary gift to receive, and very happy is the Society which has benefactors such as Mr. Wyndham. Your Society has a high reputation for good work done in the past. You have here a fine museum housed in a historic building; its collections are of great interest, and now you have a first-rate benefactor to help you. Encouraged by this newest addition which Mr. Wyndham has just made to your building, you will be able to go on from strength to



EASTERN END OF THE COURTYARD OF TAUNTON CASTLE,
showing the position (1933) in which the new Wyndham Galleries have been built

From a Photograph by Mr. H. St. George Gray, F.S.A.

strength, I am sure, in accordance with the traditions which the Society has established and to which you have to live up in future.'

He then went on to speak of the museum service of this country as a whole, which, he pointed out, had been established largely by the enterprise of local societies. After tracing the early history of museums in this country from the collections of the Tradescants, which became the Ashmolean Museum, and of Sir Hans Sloane, which led in 1753 to the foundation of the British Museum, he then mentioned that out of a total of 595 museums included in the 'Museum Association's Directory', 68 were apparently administered by local societies, and the Somerset County Museum was one of the chief of these. The country owed a great debt to such private individuals and local societies.

Sir Frederick asked what should be the attitude of the community towards the Society which maintained a museum for it, and what should be the attitude of the Society towards the community? What ought to be the position of a community which had already been provided by private munificence with that which it would otherwise have had to provide for itself? It was very certain that it was the duty of a community to see that its people were provided with libraries and museums and other necessities of education. He felt that unless a society was able to maintain its museum up to a full level of efficiency, with adequate buildings and equipment and staff (adequately paid), it had a right to look to the community to give the help that was necessary to maintain it up to that standard.

The ultimate solution of this question, Sir Frederick believed, was that the community, whether a town or a county, should undertake the upkeep of the museum where it had already been provided by private generosity, while the Society should take as its first duty the promotion of knowledge both by instruction to the public and by the development of research.

Somerset had admirable material to work upon; an ancient county with its roots in the remote past and monuments and objects of all periods bearing on the history of England; it had an active Society and a well-equipped museum in which the

objects were clearly labelled and well set out, and which showed signs of constant interest and supervision. He congratulated Mr. Wyndham on his work for the Museum, and wished the Society God-speed in its work for the future.

In the name of the Museums Association, Dr. Cyril Fox, its President, also congratulated the Somerset Society on this important extension and Mr. Wyndham on his generosity. He had been privileged to speak on a similar occasion that year when the new building at Salisbury Museum, also given by Mr. Wyndham, was opened.

Passing on to the functions of museums, Dr. Fox remarked that educational authorities were beginning to realize that our educational system was not yet a complete, adequate, and rounded whole. Museum collections were of vital importance in any well-considered system of education. Much attention had been given in recent years to Museum technique ; this had resulted in great improvement in arrangement, labelling, and display. To-day, in a well-organized provincial museum, children could see an epitome of the sequence of events in their countryside, and in their town area, from the remotest times up to the present ; some of them would certainly learn to appreciate the variety and richness of our common heritage, contemplation of which was, to many, the greatest joy which leisure brings.

Dr. Fox went on to speak of the series of notable finds made in the lake villages of Somerset by Dr. A. Bulleid and Mr. St. George Gray, illustrating a forgotten civilization—a civilization which evoked works of art which would be striking in any period. He knew nothing more stimulating to the imagination than these material records of the past obtained so carefully and with such skilful labour from these sites, and no more fascinating exercise for the imagination than to consider the environment, and the social, economic, and personal factors connected with their production. In conclusion Dr. Fox warmly congratulated the Society on the magnificent contributions which had been made in Somerset to the science of archæology.

The company now proceeded, through the Great Hall of the Castle, to the new galleries, which they entered through a door unlocked by Mr. Wyndham with a silver-gilt key of late

seventeenth-century type, the gift of the architects and contractors.

Mr. Wyndham then declared the galleries open and complimented Sir George Oatley on the charming building he had designed, and the contractors, Messrs. H. W. Pollard & Sons, of Bridgwater, on the results of their labours. He said the building was so modest that it did not detract from the older buildings near by. He had now accomplished his desire, which was to put some of the Somerset and Wiltshire museums in a position to improve themselves, and to bring a knowledge of the county story to the county schools. Mr. Wyndham concluded by thanking everyone who had helped to bring the work to a satisfactory conclusion.

The Right Hon. Sir Matthew Nathan expressed the Society's gratitude to Mr. Wyndham for the gift of the extension, for the furniture for the museum, books and deeds for the library, and for his contributions to the development fund and to the special purposes fund ; he also mentioned the Tone lands, the lecture hall, new workrooms, and schools museum, purchased and provided for the Society by Mr. Wyndham. The Society was an educational body, and the ultimate beneficiaries of the gift would be the people of Somerset and the wider public. He enumerated a good many of Mr. Wyndham's benefactions to other places, and then thanked the chief speakers, Sir Frederick Kenyon and Dr. Cyril Fox, who had so willingly come to help them that day ; he also thanked Sir George Oatley and his partner, Mr. Lawrence, and the contractors and work-people associated with them in the work.

Mr. H. St. George Gray, the Society's Curator for the past thirty-three years, said he had seen vast changes in the development of the Society and its museum and library. The work entailed had meant a great deal of self-sacrifice. Mr. Wyndham had generously changed the outlook of the Society and the museum ; but they were sadly under-staffed. Mr. Gray proceeded to make suggestions for raising the income by securing the interest of a wider public. He wanted the members to realize that they were all part-owners of Taunton Castle and its contents. The new galleries would probably be devoted to the archæological remains found in Somerset, and would include

the highly interesting antiquities found in the Somerset lake villages. It was of course a joy to Dr. Bulleid and to himself that such a worthy home had been provided for such a unique collection. Now that they had this new place, they were also given a wider outlook as to the general arrangement of the whole museum—a matter which required considerable thought to develop it on right lines. This they must remember was a county museum and not confined to Taunton and West Somerset.

Mr. Gray said in conclusion that it remained for him to convey publicly his personal thanks to Mr. Wyndham for the great service he had rendered to the museum with which he (the speaker) had been so long and so closely associated.

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The Wyndham Galleries consist of two floors, with a hall connecting them with the Great Hall of the Castle. The whole wing, however, is designed to give, when finally completed, three floors of galleries some 107 ft. in length by 36 ft. in width. The floors are of fireproof construction throughout, and the exterior of the building is faced with stone, most of which accrued from the demolition of old and ruinous buildings on the site. New dressed stonework comes from the Ham Hill quarries. The walls are of cavity construction and lined internally with 'ten-test'. The reinforced steel construction is on the 'Hennibique' system; the heating on the panel system.

A notable feature of the exterior is a carved relief of the Wyndham arms, below which is a stone slab bearing the following inscription :

WILLIAM WYNDHAM
OF ORCHARD WYNDHAM
GAVE THESE TWO GALLERIES TO THE
SOMERSETSHIRE ARCHÆOLOGICAL
AND NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY
TO DISPLAY AND MAKE WELL KNOWN
SOME EVIDENCES OF THE COUNTY STORY
1933—1934