

A Photographic Survey of the County of Somerset.

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THE importance of photographic surveys, by which is meant the systematic collection of photographic records of all objects of archæological or historical interest within a given area, is, I believe, already widely recognised. The question of organising such a survey of the county of Somerset has been brought before this society on previous occasions. Professor Allen read a paper on the subject at the Crewkerne meeting, and reference was also made to it at Wellington. After the latter meeting I had some correspondence on the matter with Mr. Elworthy; but, although the attitude of the Council of the Society towards the proposal was described as being sympathetic, there was no distinct evidence that the sympathy was of an active type, and the matter dropped for the time.

Quite recently, however, the whole question of photographic surveys has entered on a new phase. Their importance has been officially recognised by the authorities of the British Museum, who have announced that they are willing, under certain regulations which are still to be formulated, to take charge of the results of such surveys, and store them in such manner that the public can have access to them.

Moreover, a National Photographic Record Society has been formed, under the presidency of Sir Benjamin Stone, to whose influence the decision of the Museum authorities is largely due,

and it at present includes representatives of the British Museum, the Royal Society, the Royal Photographic Society, the Society of Antiquaries, the Royal Archæological Institute, the Congress of Archæological Societies, and other scientific societies. Its object is to encourage the organisation of photographic surveys, to formulate rules and recommendations so that they may be carried out in a fairly uniform manner throughout the country, and to collect photographic prints with a view to form a National Photographic Record which will be deposited at the British Museum.

It seems clear, however, that though a national society may do much good service by laying down general principles and drawing up a model scheme, the actual work must be done by local societies or by local branches of the national society. Further, it will probably be agreed that, in addition to the national collection in London, it is in the highest degree desirable that there should be a local collection in each county, in the custody of some representative body, municipal or otherwise.

I venture to think that no associations can more appropriately take the initiative in organising the surveys of their own districts than the county archæological societies, where they exist; and if they have a local habitation, in some fairly convenient centre, they may with equal fitness be the custodians of the results. So far as Somerset is concerned, the council of this Society some time ago expressed its readiness to take charge of the results: the object of this paper is to excite interest of a somewhat more active and productive type, and to secure co-operation in the organising and carrying out of the work. Results must be obtained before they can be taken charge of.

If it is admitted, as I assume it to be, that a photographic survey of the county is desirable, it will not be denied that the sooner the work is undertaken the better. Many objects of great interest are in constant danger, or are even being

destroyed, leaving no record behind except possibly some drawing which may do credit to the imagination of the artist, but at the same time may have no value for the purposes of exact knowledge. In Somerset many of the most interesting objects in the architectural section are of a domestic type, and these are the very places that are most liable to alteration or destruction.

Taking both points as admitted, I propose to submit for consideration some suggestions of a more or less practical character, relative to the organisation of a photographic survey of this county.

In the first place it is noteworthy that in many localities, and Somerset is fortunately one of them, a large part of the actual photographing has already been done: it only remains to collect (as far as possible), classify, and catalogue the results. Professor Allen, as many members are aware, has made a considerable number of negatives of objects of interest in the county. The Rev. T. Perkins, formerly of Shaftesbury, has photographed many things in Somerset, including most, if not all, of the churches. I myself have negatives of different parts of Cleve Abbey. Village crosses, too, have to my knowledge already received considerable attention from two amateurs in the county.

The county is, I believe, exceptionally fortunate in the existence of a large number of negatives of subjects which have since disappeared. Many of Professor Allen's negatives are of this class. Archdeacon Ainslie, I understand, has a negative of the tower of St. Mary's, Taunton, before it was rebuilt, and possibly he has other subjects of equal interest. In the Society's museum there are prints from negatives of churches, old houses, and the like, many of which have since been altered or destroyed altogether. It is satisfactory to be able to say that these latter negatives are still in existence and in good keeping, and that permanent prints from them can be had, though most probably they will have to be paid for.

It will readily be understood, however, that a great deal of photographing has still to be done ; but, if it is to be useful for the purpose under consideration, it must be done in a systematic way. No doubt many active photographers who would be willing to help in the work would be the last to lay claim to any antiquarian knowledge. In order to ensure not only that the right things are photographed, but also that they are photographed in the right way, it is essential that, with the co-operation of competent antiquaries in different parts of the county, as complete a list as possible be drawn up of the places and objects in the county that are best worth photographing ; and this list must also state the special features of each place or object.

The preparation of such a list would naturally be the first thing undertaken.

The next step will be to ascertain, as far as possible, what subjects have already been done, and whether the particular photographers are willing to contribute prints to the county collection. This will involve not a little correspondence, and also labour in arranging and cataloguing. It may also involve some expenditure on the purchase of prints.

The third step will be to secure the help of as many photographers as possible, and to organise their energies, so that the work still to be done may be got through rapidly. Now in counties in which successful survey work has already been done, there have been large and active photographic societies, and the work has been systematised and carried out mainly by these societies in their corporate capacity. In Somerset, so far as I am aware, there is at present only one photographic society, that at Bath, and possibly another may come into existence before long. Probably, too, the Bristol societies would help, so far at least as the northern parts of the county are concerned. It is clear, however, that for some time to come, prosecution of the work in Somerset must be dependent on the help of sympathetic individuals, working to a large ex-

tent independently of one another, and therefore with all the more need for some central committee to prevent waste of obvious energy. It is also clear that the organisation in a county like this, where photographic societies are almost non-existent, must differ from that in counties where such societies are sufficiently powerful and numerous to carry out the work.

It is scarcely necessary to discuss technical details such as the size of the prints, the processes by which they are to be produced, and the like. Such matters can only be dealt with by a committee of experts.

I have indicated very broadly the main divisions of the work that a photographic survey of the county would involve. It seems certain that it can only be carried out successfully under the supervision of an efficient and representative committee, comprising both antiquaries and photographers. The chief point that I have to submit for the consideration of the Society is whether this committee shall be appointed and aided by the Society. Some funds would certainly be necessary, but the amount required would not be large, and it would diminish as time went on. The chief expense would be on account of printing and postages. Letters of enquiry would have to be sent out, and certain schedules, forms, and catalogues would be indispensable. The only other items would be the boxes or cases for storing the prints, and the purchase of prints where they could not be obtained as gifts.

Whether the general funds of the Society could bear a small annual charge for this purpose, or whether an appeal would have to be made for voluntary subscriptions, is a point on which I am necessarily quite unable to express an opinion. If voluntary subscriptions should be necessary, I should yet venture to hope that the Society, if it desires to promote or encourage such a survey, would be able and willing to defray the initial expenses, such as those occasioned by the preliminary letters of enquiry and the drawing up and printing of the list of places and objects. An appeal for subscriptions

could be made with much greater show of reason, and much better hope of success, if a definite plan had already been worked out, and there was reasonable probability of the work being carried through.

Should the Society think it well to afford active support of the character indicated, it would naturally follow that the local collection of prints would be placed in the hands of the Society. A duplicate set of prints would, one would hope, be contributed to the national collection at the British Museum.

If, on the other hand, the Society should consider that a Photographic Survey of the County is not particularly desirable, or that it does not properly come within the scope of the Society, it would follow that the work, if undertaken at all, would have to be undertaken by an independent committee or association. This would be a conclusion and a result which I for one should greatly deplore, for the work could not be thoroughly carried out without the aid of the special knowledge which members of this Society possess, and it would gain much by the direction and control which the Society is specially fitted to supply. I venture to urge, therefore, that the subject is one which the Society might very appropriately take up; and I trust that a committee may be appointed as soon as possible, so that though Somerset cannot now be the first county to take up the matter, it may yet be one of the foremost counties in initiating and completing a work which, in the minds of many, is of considerably more than local importance and interest.