

The
Cambridge & County Folk Museum
Association.



FIRST ANNUAL REPORT
for
The Year Ending December 31st, 1936.



THE CAMBRIDGE AND COUNTY FOLK MUSEUM,
2, CASTLE STREET, CAMBRIDGE.

The Cambridge & County Folk Museum Association.

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CAMBRIDGE & COUNTY FOLK MUSEUM ASSOCIATION.

FIRST ANNUAL REPORT

For the Year Ending December 31st, 1936.

THE principal objects of the Association are (a) to collect and preserve for the benefit of the general public and for the purposes of education, objects of local interest and of common use, illustrating the social life of the people of the geographical county of Cambridge from the end of the Middle Ages to the present day, and (b) for these purposes, to secure, equip and maintain, suitable premises.

It will, therefore, be of interest to note that in a communication to the Cambridge Antiquarian Society as far back as 1895 the Rev. C. L. Acland, of Jesus College, spoke of the collection of specimens of "things which were of everyday use in the times of our fathers and grandfathers, but which are now no longer seen, or, if found in use at all, found in remote spots which have as yet to some extent escaped the flood of change which in recent years has poured over our country." His object was to arouse an interest in what he defined as "antiquities of the immediate past" before it should be too late, and he believed that a valuable and historically instructive collection might be got together from within the boundaries of Cambridgeshire.

A step in this direction was taken in October, 1933, when an exhibition of local antiques was held in Cambridge, organised by the Cambridgeshire Federation of Women's Institutes. The hope was then expressed that the exhibition would show the necessity of having a museum for the preservation of objects illustrating the lives of Cambridgeshire people.

In October, 1934, Mr. E. Saville Peck, who had served on the Executive Committee which organised the exhibition, read a paper to the Cambridge Rotary Club in which he advocated the foundation in Cambridge of a Folk Museum of local interest, designed to appeal more particularly to the ordinary resident in this

county. The Club, approving the proposal, agreed to call a Conference for the discussion of such a project. A Provisional Committee, formed under the Chairmanship of Mr. Peck, inspected various premises and prepared a draft scheme which was eventually submitted to a well attended meeting at the Lecture Rooms, Mill Lane, Cambridge, on October 26th, 1935. This Conference was presided over by the Mayor of Cambridge (Alderman R. Starr), and there were present many representatives of the Local Authorities, the University, the Cambridge Antiquarian Society and other Societies with antiquarian interests.

The aims and objects were explained by the Chairman of the Provisional Committee, and an address on Folk Museums was given by Mr. F. C. Morgan, Curator of the Hereford Municipal Folk Museum, who very kindly came over for the occasion. Eventually, resolutions were carried unanimously to the effect—

(a) that an Association be formed for the exhibition of objects of special local interest dating from the end of the Middle Ages onward,

(b) that suitable premises be hired for the purpose,
and

(c) that a Committee be appointed to prepare a constitution and to report to the Association at an early date.

The newly constituted Committee was representative of various bodies whose sympathies it was desired to enlist, together with persons whose experience would be of special value. They were fortunate in securing the good will of the Lord Lieutenant, Mr. C. R. W. Adeane, C.B., who kindly consented to be the Patron of the Association.

It will be seen that the chief immediate tasks of the Committee were to prepare a constitution and to secure premises. These were achieved and reported to a meeting of the Association on March 16th, 1936, when they were duly approved by that body.

In setting up the Committees provided for in the constitution, it was especially desired to include representative members of Local Authorities in the Town and County, of the University and its Museums, and other persons specially experienced. Under the constitution of the Association, therefore, the following bodies are entitled to

send representative members, viz: the Cambridgeshire and Isle of Ely County Councils, the Cambridge Borough Council, the Ely Urban District Council, the Council of the Senate of the University of Cambridge, the Syndics of the Fitzwilliam Museum, the Committee of the University Museum of Archæology and Ethnology, the Cambridge Antiquarian Society, the Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire Archæological Society, and the Cambridge Preservation Society. Representative members from all these bodies are included in the General Committee.

On the Executive Committee are representative members of the two County Councils, the Cambridge Borough Council, the Senate of the University and the Cambridge Antiquarian Society, with the addition more particularly of members of the Association with special experience of administration and of museum management, whose advice has been of great value.

At the outset the Executive Committee estimated that to meet expenditure likely to be incurred in the first year of working, an experimental period, a sum of £350 would be required. It was considered advisable that the Museum should at first be administered, as far as possible, on a voluntary basis, until time should show that it met a real need, when, if necessary, application might properly be made to the appropriate Local Authorities for grants in aid. The Committee are, however, glad to be able to report that the Town Council have, on their own initiative, resolved to make a grant of £10 during the coming year, and in return for this, senior children attending the Borough Elementary Schools will be admitted free of charge.

On behalf of the Committee a printed letter of appeal was widely circulated throughout the geographical county, in which the objects of the Museum and the terms of the membership of the Association were set out. Under the constitution three types of membership are recognised, (a) ordinary membership (minimum annual subscription £1 - 1 - 0), (b) associate membership (minimum annual subscription 5/-), and (c) life membership (one inclusive subscription of £10 - 10 - 0).

As a result of this appeal and of other methods of approach, there were at the end of the first financial year 28 life members, 53 ordinary members and 44 associate members, while, in addition, 61 donations had been

received. Special mention may be made of the assistance rendered by the Colleges, ten of which have become life members. Lists of individual subscribers and donors are appended to this report.

The Committee are happy to be able to report that through the sympathetic attitude of the Cambridge Town Council they were able to rent from the Council the vacant premises at the foot of Castle Hill, formerly an old inn known as "The White Horse," which have proved to be well adapted for the purposes of a Folk Museum. The premises have attractive features, such as the old cobble-paved yard, the open hearth on the ground floor, and the ancient wall timbers exposed in some of the rooms. The Town Council met the Committee in a generous spirit and incurred considerable expenditure in putting the premises into proper condition, suitable for the purposes of a museum.

The opening ceremony of the Museum took place on November 3rd, 1936, and the Association are greatly indebted to the Master and Fellows of Magdalene College for permitting the meeting to be held in the Hall of the College. In the unavoidable absence of the Patron (the Lord Lieutenant) the chair was taken by Alderman Mrs. Adeane, who was supported by the Bishop of Ely, the Mayor of Cambridge (Alderman H. T. Wing), the Chairman of the County Council (Councillor H. Franklin), the Master of Magdalene College (Mr. A. B. Ramsay), Sir Cyril Fox (Curator of the National Museum of Wales), and members of the Committees of the Association. The meeting was largely attended by those who had in various ways given practical support to the project. The President (Mr. E. Saville Peck) reported on the progress made, and was followed by Sir Cyril Fox who gave an address on Folk Museums, and was kind enough to speak in appreciative terms of what had so far been achieved by the Cambridge Association. At its conclusion the company adjourned to the Folk Museum premises, where Sir Cyril Fox formally opened the entrance gates, and those present proceeded to inspect the building and its contents.

Since the formal opening it may reasonably be claimed that considerable progress has been made in the task of acquiring objects suitable for exhibition as contemplated by the promoters of the scheme. The nature and type of the objects which it was desired to acquire, as illustrating local

social life and limited to the past few centuries, were made known to the public in various ways, apart from the general appeal already mentioned. Frequent articles and notices have appeared in the local Press, especially in the "Cambridge Daily News," while the "Cambridge Review" has published two exceedingly interesting articles on Folk Museums in general and the Cambridge Folk Museum in particular, in which Mr. Saltmarsh, of King's College, has made clear the kind of exhibit which it is desired to secure. Several addresses have also been given by the officers of the Association to such bodies as the Cambridge Rotary Club, the County Branch of the National Union of Teachers and the Cambridgeshire Federation of Women's Institutes. Addresses arranged for since the end of the financial year include one by the President in the Cambridge Borough Library series, and by Mr. Saltmarsh to the Cambridge Antiquarian Society.

The response to these various appeals for objects for exhibition has been most encouraging, and leaves the Committee in no anxiety on that score. Miss Catherine Parsons (Hon. Curator), Dr. Palmer, Mr. Louis Clarke and Dr. Cobbett and the Executors of the late Mr. J. Winship should especially be mentioned as having contributed generously in the early stages from their collections, and many other members of the Association of known antiquarian interests have also been most helpful donors. Acknowledgment should also be made of the further practical interest shown by the Cambridge Town Council by their loan of standard measures and the staffs of High Constables and Parish Constables. But what has particularly encouraged the Committee has been the support given by ordinary members of the public, a large number of whom have, after visiting the Museum, shown their interest by presenting articles in their possession, entirely on their own initiative. The Committee much regret that it is not practicable to include a list of these benefactors in this, the first Annual Report, but it is hoped to make suitable acknowledgment at a later date.

It should perhaps be explained here that it is desired that objects for exhibition shall be of local origin and local interest. The great majority of exhibits do belong to the County, but a few have been accepted from outside it if they do, in fact, illustrate past Cambridgeshire life and customs, it being a mere accident that the gift came

from outside the County borders. While, also, the Museum is not designed to record local history, but rather to display evidence of past social customs, it would, in the opinion of the Committee, be unwise to exclude evidence of past events and superstitions in the County. They readily attract attention, and in this way help to arouse in the local residents that interest in the past life of their Home County, which it is the main object of the Museum to foster.

During the eight weeks which elapsed between the opening day and the end of the year under review, 370 visits were recorded as having been paid to the Museum, exclusive of the ceremonial opening and of official visits. If continued with the same frequency this would represent approximately 3,000 visits during the course of a year. The record is, however, admittedly incomplete, and more recent experience suggests that the total for the year 1937 will be in excess of this estimate, especially as it is anticipated that visits will be paid by groups of school children and others.

The Committee desire to express their indebtedness to Miss Catherine Parsons, who, in addition to her generosity as a donor of objects for exhibition, has given much time to the service of the Museum as its Honorary Curator. The Museum owes much of the charm which appeals to visitors to her skill in arrangement. The Committee are also fortunate in their Custodian, Mr. R. C. Lambeth, whose knowledge of the subject and willingness to help in every way are fully appreciated.

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