

Reviews

The Abingdon Corporation Plate : Some Notes on the Abingdon Plate and Kindred Treasures and on the Donors and the Occasions of the Gifts, by Arthur E. Preston, F.S.A., edited by Agnes C. Baker. Printed at the University Press, Oxford, 1958. xii, pp. 84 ; 27 pages of half-tone plates. Price 20s.

The late Mr. Arthur E. Preston served his native Abingdon and the neighbourhood in a variety of official capacities, besides devoting much of his long life to research into the history of the town, and ultimately bequeathing seven paintings and many prints to the Corporation. He had hoped, in collaboration with Mr. E. Alfred Jones, to publish a full account of the Corporation's works of art, but the recent war halted their project and both men died before its end. Miss Agnes Baker undertook to edit Mr. Preston's notes for publication ; her death three years ago might have frustrated the enterprise had not Miss G. Mary Baker eventually carried out the final task of seeing her sister's manuscript through the press.

It is the best book yet published on the plate of an English borough in its fullness and accuracy, no less than in its presentation and in the quality of the illustrations. As its full title suggests, it is more than a bare enumeration and description of the plate and miscellaneous objects, nearly 500 items in all, which belong to the Corporation and to Christ's Hospital, and which rival in quality and number those of many cities. Most of the pieces, at least the important ones, have been related to the lives of their donors, who at one time or another during the past four centuries have held some office connected with Abingdon, whose names are familiar in the town or whose families still live there. The division of this book into what is tantamount to three parts (dealing respectively with insignia, domestic plate and the more numerous miscellaneous items) will not prevent a reader from seeing, through a necessary confusion of chronology, an unusual view of four centuries of local history.

The coat of arms for the borough's first common seal allowed by the grant of a charter in 1556 was a happy combination of details from those of the suppressed Abbey and the Fraternity of the Holy Cross. Of the five extant seals, the earliest was made in 1605 ; its history is given in some detail and supported, as are many of the notes, by extracts from the Corporation minutes. A medal was struck to commemorate the dissolution of the borough by the Municipal Corporations Act of 1835 and a gold impression was given by the High Steward, the 5th Earl of Abingdon, to each of the twelve Principal Burgesses thus removed from office. Besides three impressions of this medal by Rundells, there are various insignia of the kind belonging to most corporations. The Mayor's chain and badge of office were presented in 1879 by John Cremer Clarke of Waste Court, the last (Liberal) Member for Abingdon before its merger into the North Berks Division, and the badge for the Mayoress was presented to commemorate the Silver Jubilee. The large mace, bought in 1599 and recorded in the 1617 inventory, must have been altered at the beginning of the Commonwealth and replaced, probably soon after the Restoration by the present great mace of silver-gilt, a splendid specimen in notably good repair. The earliest of the three little maces is almost certainly the one made in 1599, the pattern of which was followed, probably after the Restoration, for the other two.

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An inventory drawn up in the year 1589 records four major pieces of domestic plate and a dozen spoons. They were a gilt ewer and basin presented by John Roysse, refounder of the Old Town Grammar School (the redecoration of the Roysse Room was due to Mr. Preston); a gilt 'ale cuppe and cover' bequeathed in 1587 by James Fysher, one of the original twelve Principal Burgesses; a goblet given by Humphrey Hyde, at one time Mayor, in satisfaction of a debt owed by his uncle Oliver, the first M.P. for Abingdon; and another, double-gilt, given by Lionel Bostock, Mayor for four separate terms. The spoons were given by Thomas Tesdale of Fitzharris Manor, who was a co-founder of Pembroke College, Oxford.

But at Abingdon, as nearly everywhere else, old and damaged plate was from time to time replaced. Indeed, a note on the earlier inventory records that the Mayor, Bailiffs and Burgesses thought it good to replace the Fisher cup ('being out of fashion') by a salt, though the donor's name was preserved in an engraved inscription. Only the ewer and basin seems to have been left by 1617, the inventory of which year lists (in addition to the salt) five beer bowls, a bread bowl, and some apparently new spoons, though no connexion with the original gifts is recorded.

None of these items have been preserved; the earliest extant pieces are the two cups of 1639, replacing weight for weight the Bostock cup, followed in chronological sequence by a skirted tankard of 1651 bequeathed by the Anabaptist London Fishmonger, Richard Wrigglesworth, a native of Marcham. A similar tankard of 1653 was given by Sir John Lenthall, the surviving son of William, Speaker of the House of Commons in the Long Parliament. John Lenthall was likewise a member of the Parliamentary Party, having been in 1658, the year of his gift, returned as member for Abingdon. He was elected to the Convention Parliament summoned in 1660 to restore the monarchy but made a speech in defence of the regicides for which he was imprisoned. However, it was alleged that a false return had been given by the Mayor, John Mayott (no less than six bearers of this name have been Mayor) and Lenthall was unseated in favour of his opponent, Sir George Stonhouse, Bart., of Radley, the former Royalist member. Yet the "grand braggadocio" was not disgraced, for, inheriting the Manor of Besselsleigh and the Priory, Burford, on his father's death, he was made High Sheriff and was knighted by Charles II in 1677. Stonhouse, too, gave a tankard, twice as large, for the use of the Mayors and Burgesses, though this was capped by an even larger tankard of 1700 given by his daughter-in-law and grandson (M.P. for Berkshire from 1701 until 1733) which is distinguished also by the heraldic talbot—the Stonhouse crest—which lies modelled on its lid.

During the eighteenth century the character of the collection of plate continued to alter and even more magnificent gifts were received. In 1721 the salt and two of the bowls were exchanged for a set of casters and two new trencher salts and a dozen rat-tailed spoons were ordered. The Earls of Abingdon, High Stewards of the Borough, were responsible for a remarkable series of gifts for four generations. The second earl gave two punch-bowls and ladles of 1740, the third earl two salvers of 1743 and a large two-handled cup of 1744 (for which the bill has been preserved) and the fourth earl two more punch-bowls and ladles of 1760. The Hon. John Morton, for many years Recorder and Tory Member of Parliament, presented a number of smaller items, while an impressive large gilt vase of 1795 given (one of several such presentations) by Lloyd's to Admiral Sir George Bowyer, Bart., for his gallantry in the *Barfleur* against the French off Ushant in the previous year represents

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the neo-classical tradition. Bowyer had shortly before inherited the manor of Radley from his Uncle, Rev. Sir James Stonhouse.

Gifts of this kind were no less frequent during the next century and a half, but fewer items are worthy of note. A six-branched candelabrum of 1845, already connected with Abingdon, was presented by Bromley Challenor, Town Clerk, during the mayoralty in 1909 of his brother, H. S. Challenor.

The survival of 170 beechwood trenchers from the sixteenth century is remarkable; they were presumably used until the acquisition of over 200 pewter plates and dishes during the eighteenth century. Together they are thought to form the only large group of these intrinsically valueless but historically important objects that have been preserved. Of the more miscellaneous items, the late Elizabethan bronze gallon and quart measures recall the times when local authorities were granted assize of all weights and measures, and eleven brass badges are survivals from the earlier administration of St. John's Almshouses.

G. L. TAYLOR.

Academic Dress of the University of Oxford. By D. R. Venables and R. E. Clifford, Hon.M.A. Shepherd and Woodward, Oxford. Price 5s. 6d.

This booklet satisfies a long-standing need, and in this handy form should appeal to a wide public. Mr. Venables and Mr. Clifford are to be congratulated on having taken this matter in hand.

There are a few blemishes in the text. The authors state on p. 4 that 'the dress now worn is much the same as in medieval times'; on the contrary it has changed greatly. Undergraduates do not in fact wear caps at lectures (p. 7). Who are the 'senior students' referred to on p. 30?

As regards the illustrations, the hoods of the M.Ch. (p. 17) and the B.Phil. (p. 23) are not properly worn; the lining should be displayed equally on both sides and the liri-pipe should point inwards. The D.Phil. blue (p. 19) should be navy as described. On p. 25 the D.Litt. convocation dress is too small for the wearer. The great fault in the illustrations, however, is that all the black gowns are so black that they are almost silhouettes. They would have been better if the photographic process used in Almond's booklet on Cambridge College Gowns (2nd edn., 1926) had been adopted.

The B.D. might have been illustrated, and it is not mentioned (p. 22) that with gown, hood, and bands a cassock and cincture are worn by B.D.s. Nothing is mentioned of the dress worn at University services which is fully discussed in Buxton and Gibson's *Oxford University Ceremonies* (1935), pp. 110-111.

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