

Wiltshire Archaeological & Natural History Society

WEDNESDAY EVENING, SEPTEMBER 14th

In our last week's Gazette we left our friends, the Archaeologists, to the number of some 150, sitting down to the annual dinner, which was admirably served by mine host of the Pemroke Arms, at Wilton, and which was supplemented by the munificent present from Lady Herbert of a buck, a plentiful supply of game, and a magnificent dessert.

At the conclusion of the repast, the President (Mr Charles Penruddocke), after the usual loyal toasts, proposed the *Bishop and Clergy*, to which the Venerable Archdeacon responded; the *Army, Navy, and Volunteers*, acknowledged by Captain Maunders; the *Members of Parliament*, to which Sir E. Antrobus, M.P. for Wilton, and Mr G. Goldney, M.P. for Chippenham, replied; the *Magistrates of the County*, for whom Mr Matcham returned thanks. Then Canon Jackson proposed the health of the *President*, who, in reply, paid the same compliment to the *General Secretaries*. To this the Rev. A. C. Smith responded, and proposed the *Local Secretaries*, which was acknowledged by Mr Swayne, The *Mayor of Wilton* was given by Mr Nightingale; and last but by no means least, the *Ladies*, for whom Mr Henry Medicott gallantly replied.

It was now time to adjourn to the Town Hall, where a *Conversations* had been announced, and to which the very liberal Mayor of Wilton had hospitably invited the Archaeologists and their friends; and where, indeed, throughout the evening, tea and coffee, ices, claret and champagne, and other good things were incessantly handed round, and claimed a share of the attention which even your thorough-going antiquarian does not deem it incumbent on him wholly to bestow on the things of the past. However, there was food enough also for the mind; and so at 9 o'clock the President took the chair, and called on Mr Nightingale to read a paper on "Objects of interest in the excursion of the following day." This was an immense boon to the intending excursionists, as it gave them some practical knowledge of the scenes they were about to visit, and prepared them for the objects of interest they were to expect; moreover, the addition of a handy map of the route to be followed left nothing to be desired in the way of preliminary information.....

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 15th

Early this morning the quiet city of Salisbury was roused from its wonted repose by the unusual sight of a long line of breaks and other carriages wending their way towards Wilton; but when they reached the Town Hall of that little town, and extended through its main street from end to end, numbering no less than twenty-eight conveyances, the astonishment of the "oldest inhabitant" was unbounded, and the ecstasy of the juvenile population of the ancient borough of Wilton was complete.

The indefatigable Local Secretary, Mr Stevens, was in command of the cavalcade, and we may say he was ubiquitous on the occasion – marshalling, arranging, directing, and in all respects consulting the comfort and convenience of every member of his large party. The route lay first through the valley of the Nadder, skirting below Groveley Wood, and near Hurdcott House: looking up at the famous "Chiselbury Camp" on one side, and at "Castle Ditches" on the other; through the villages of Barford St. Martin and Fovant, until after a lovely drive of fourteen miles Ferne House was reached, the hospitable mansion of Mr Grazer Grove, one of the Members for South Wilts. Here the Archaeologists had been most kindly invited to lunch by its owner, and full

justice was done to the entertainment by our excursionists, and, indeed, ample was the store of viands, and unlimited supply of champagne, though the influx of so large a party of visitors might reasonably exhausted less liberal provisions. At the conclusion of the feast, those who had been straggling over the house and grounds were recalled to the central-hall by the whistles of the Secretaries, and there the President, in graceful terms, expressed the thanks of the Society to this entertainment.....

The shades of evening already began to draw on as the party left Fonthill, but daylight enough remained to enable them to appreciate the lovely valleys through which they passed on their way to Compton Park; and passing through the villages of Bishop's Fonthill, Chilmark, Teffont, Dinton and Baverstock, they at length reached the house of their President, where they examined with great interest certain relics of the unfortunate Royalist, Colonel Penruddocke, of whose trial and execution at Exeter in 1655 they had heard so touching a memorial the previous day; and here too they inspected many other interesting heir-looms, such as the old Wiltshire family of Penruddocke might be expected to possess. And now the hospitable President led the way to a large tent, where dinner had been prepared, to which the whole body of Archaeologists sat down, and for a time nothing could be heard over the clatter of plates and the popping of champagne corks; but at length even the appetites of Excursionists were satisfied, and then the High Sheriff (Mr Ravenhill) rose, and in a few but hearty words proposed the health of the President, and thanked him in the name of his many guests for the liberal entertainment he had given; this was seconded by Canon Jackson in his happiest vein of humour, and well echoed by the company, and then Mr Penruddocke acknowledged the compliment, assuring the members of the Archaeological Society of his satisfaction at their visit, and his hearty appreciation of their work, a sentiment which the worthy President certainly carried out in action, by the splendid banquet which he had provided for his numerous friends.

The drive back to Wilton was in perfect darkness, so that the beauties of this portion of the valley of the Nadder were lost to view; but even when the somewhat exhausted excursionists reached Wilton, their labours were not concluded, for was there not another *Conversations* announced in the inexorable programme, to be held at the Town Hall?

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 16th

This morning the Archaeologists made their way from Wilton by railway to Salisbury, where they assembled before 10 o'clock at the South Wilts and Blackmore Museums, and were soon dispersed in full contemplation and admiration of the treasures which are there contained. Soon however the proceedings of the day were opened by the Rev. A. C. Smith, who shortly stated the order to be followed, and then called on Mr E. T. Stevens to give some explanation of the arrangement of the Blackmore Museum, which that gentleman did in a very lucid manner, showing the arrangement of implements by periods, and commenting on the many specimens of modern savage weapons and tools with which the walls were hung, and which were probable indications of similar contrivances in use during the "Stone period".....

.... where the Rev. A. P. Morris conducted the party over his Church, and offered hospitality to all who visited his house, where a small but good collection of British birds invited inspection. Thence by St. Nicholas hospital, in the suburbs of Salisbury, where the quaint old buildings give rise to much discussion and some difference of opinion in regard to their former arrangement; and so through Salisbury to Wilton, whence most of the visitors took the evening trains for home; and thus concluded what (we repeatedly heard) was declared to be "the best, the most interesting, and the most enjoyable Congress which the Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Society has ever held.

(*Devizes and Wiltshire Gazette* - Thursday 22 September, 1870)