

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL VISIT

*Excavating the Society's archives, **Derek Barnard** has uncovered a report of the proceedings of the British Archaeological Society when it took place in our City many years ago.*

One hundred and forty-five years ago, in late July, the tenth annual meeting of the British Archaeological Society was held in Rochester. The Illustrated London News of 6 August 1853 records the previous week's activities. Reading the report you are immediately struck by the fact that the itinerary is exactly the same as we would arrange today for a visiting group - except that the write-up would, I hope, be less formal.

'The place of meeting on this occasion was well chosen as an archaeological centre - furnishing much of the work of the occasion at its heart and distributing the rest over an area lying within reasonable circumference

At 2pm on the Monday, everyone met at the Guildhall where the President, Mr Bernall, delivered 'a long and elaborate address on the study of archaeology and its application' as well as 'a comprehensive sketch of the objects of interest they had come to examine in Rochester and the adjacent district'. He also explained the history of the bridge, a new structure being in course of erection in that year by Messrs Fox & Henderson.

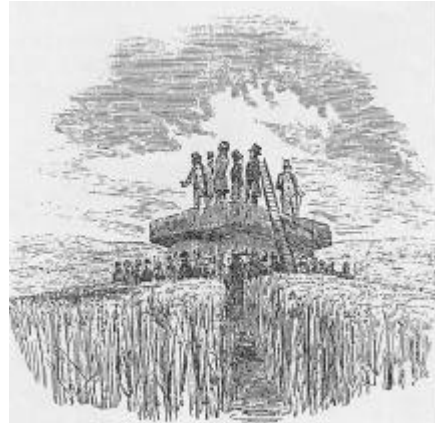
A paper was then read by Dr Beattie on the Castle's history and all proceeded to view and explore the ruins. When asked its age, their guide explained in some detail why the Keep (1127) was of Anglo-Roman and Anglo-Saxon workmanship. The artist then drew the now familiar engraving Rochester Castle - Entrance to the Keep.

Tuesday was spent looking at the architecture of the Cathedral and then various local buildings; among them St Margaret's church, St Catherine's and St Bartholomew's Hospitals, Eastgate House and at Stroud (sic), the Red Lion Inn and Temple Farmhouse. A visit was also made to the Crown Inn, at that time still an early 13th century timber framed, lath and plaster building. Study was made of the gateway arch to the yard which displayed moulded jambs and carved spandrels of the reign of Henry VII, and inside, beams and minor details of the same period. Much admired was the vaulted undercroft 40 feet long, 15 feet wide and 15 feet high. What a treasure that building would have been had it survived! In the evening no less than eleven papers were read by members. One hopes for the delegate's sakes that they were short.

Wednesday was the first excursion day when they covered, almost exactly, the Society's 'Dickensland Tour', taking in Halstow and Cooling churches, Cooling Castle - where the occupant treated them to luncheon on the grass - before visiting Cliffe church and Cobham hall. A visit to Shorne was cancelled due to time running out and the day finished in Cobham church to admire the architecture and the brasses.

On Thursday a visit was made to Kits Coty where a ladder was obtained from a local farmer so that certain gentlemen could stand on the top. Around the base stood the rest of the group while some 'wandering rustics' wondered at so large a group of men admiring a pile of stones. At Allington Castle the ruins were enhanced by the beautiful day. The ferry boat then took them across the river to the Gibraltar where they 'partook of an excellent cold collation. The party then lounged away an agreeable

half hour on seats by the edge of the water; after which they again reached their carriages and proceeded to Aylesford church and Preston Park'



The Visit to Kits Coty

Friday was spent in archaeological exploration of Boxley Abbey, a luncheon at the Maidstone Guildhall provided by the Mayor and Aldermen and an inspection of the church and college grounds. A pleasant drive to Hollingbourne preceded dinner with Mr C. Wykeham FSA at Leeds Castle. At the evening meeting, more papers were read (how many members slept through them I wonder?) and then back to Rochester at a late hour.

There was breakfast for all at the Crown on Saturday morning and a final brief meeting to thank the organisers closed the proceedings. I suspect they all went home to tell their wives what a hard week it had been but even knowing the local area, I think I would have enjoyed the week. How about you?



The Old Crown Inn

Derek Barnard November 1998