

EDITORIAL COMMENT

AT THE beginning of 1948, we can look back with considerable satisfaction on the three years of the Kilkenny Archæological Society's revived existence. A report has already been issued of the first year; during 1946-1947, we have had twenty outings and twelve meetings in Kilkenny, at which papers have been read or talks given. Nineteen of our own members have addressed us and five visitors from outside. Our membership has increased from 103 in 1945 to 172 in 1947. Our financial position is satisfactory.

Apart from the regular doings of our Society, there are other events to record. For example, we will always watch with interest the progress of the Foulksrath Youth Hostel, since the first impulse for its preservation came from us. It has, in 1947, had a wonderfully successful year and has been visited by more than 900 hostellers. We have had two meetings there, addressed by Mr. Gibb and Dr. Wyse Jackson, Dean of Cashel. An appeal issued by the Youth Hostels on behalf of the castle realised nearly £1,000, and the dilapidated wing is to be restored to provide more accommodation. An Oige has shown how historic buildings can renew their youth and be preserved for posterity without being a burden on the tax-payer; it is to be hoped that our Society, like its predecessor, the old Society, will search out similar way for saving the many other historic buildings of the city and county that may be menaced with decay or the hand of "progress."

A guide is being issued to Foulksrath Castle by An Oige in collaboration with the Kilkenny Archæological Society. Members are urged to purchase this small book, as it contains articles by Mr. Lyng, N.T., Mr. Gibb, Mr. Butler, Dr. Wyse-Jackson, and other members and patrons of our Society.

We must note here the comprehensive repairs that have been done to Kells Priory by the Office of Public Works. It is good news too, that they have taken over Carrick-on-Suir Castle, so long associated with Kilkenny and intend to preserve it after years

of neglect. In 1863, James Graves, the founder of the Kilkenny Society wrote in the Kilkenny Archæological Journal: "I do not know of any Irish baronial residence so interesting from its existing remains and historic memories as this ancient home of the Ormondes, and it is sad to see its oriels and mullioned windows open to the winds and its richly moulded plaster ceilings and oaken wainscoats falling gradually into decay." And he urged that something be done to make it staunch against the weather. Now, after eighty-five years, the still splendid remnant of this beautiful building is to be restored by the State. Better late than never! But restoration will be tragically marred if a housing scheme and a main road are to tear up the small green precincts in which the manor house stands.

Another event of importance is the removal of the Ormonde Deeds from the muniment room at Kilkenny Castle to the National Library. Though it is sad that this superb collection of Irish historical records should leave our town where they have lain for so many centuries, yet in the National Library they will be carefully cherished and accessible to all students of Irish history.

In the City of Kilkenny our Society has interested itself in the fate of the Rothe house, and the surviving gable of Henry Shee's mansion house in High Street. The owners held out to us hopes for their survival, but in the case of Shee's house, these hopes were frustrated and the last fragment of our oldest Kilkenny residence from the Confederation period has now disappeared behind the facade of an American department store.

It is with great pleasure that we learnt of the Corporation's intention to restore the Tholsel and replace its familiar clock-tower which is shown on our cover in a photograph by Mr. O. G. S. Crawford. By courtesy of the Mayor and Alderman McGuinness our Society was shown last Autumn the many historic treasures of the Municipality.

In reply to an enquiry about the future of the fine cut stone shell of Desart Court, once one of the noblest of our Georgian houses, the Land Commission has stated that they are prepared to put it into a condition of strength and safety if a public authority will take the responsibility for its future care.

During the restoration of Messrs. Delehanty's premises in High Street, a search was made for the old pre-Norman graveyard in which the Kyteler tomb now in St. Mary's was discovered a century ago. Miss Prendergast of the National Museum, came down to advise us, but the search was fruitless; yet one of our members, before they were demolished, took photographs of some mullioned

windows and other Jacobean fragments, which lay at the back of the shop, and which probably once formed a part of the house of Colonel Axtell, the regicide and Cromwellian governor of Kilkenny. Other members have taken useful photographs which should make a valuable addition to Mr. Crawford's "Kilkenny Survey." The negatives of this survey, a magnificent gift to our Society, have been sold to the National Library for £35.

Our Society now has the prospect of recovering its museum. Through the kindness of the Dean of Ossory, Dr. Burrows, we have been lent the half of the alms house at the back of the Tholsel. In return, we have been asked to take charge of the books belonging to the Evans Library in John's Quay. Many of these books are of great interest, but have suffered from years of neglect and repeated flooding. It will be a privilege to rescue them.

Mr. Monks has started a promising collection of objects of folk-lore interest, and he has also retrieved from the turf-house in Rothe's Arch a remnant of the old Kilkenny Museum, including some mediæval tiles and Latin inscribed beams from St. Canice's. Some day the rise, decline and fall of that museum, once the most famous provincial collection in Ireland, must be written. That museum owed everything to private initiative. To-day much more public assistance is available than a century ago, and there seems little doubt that if we set about it in the right way a museum, as fine as that which we lost, may be recovered.

Finally, there is a prospect of an excavation scheme this year. Dr. Bersu, the distinguished archæologist, who lectured to us in 1946 in Kilkenny and at Dunbell Rath, is now working for the Royal Irish Academy. During his stay here he inspected an ancient earthwork in our county and has held out the hope of exploring further with the spade.

We cannot close without mentioning with gratitude the consistent support we have had from the two Kilkenny papers, the "People" and the "Kilkenny Journal."

There is every hope that 1948 will be an even more eventful year in the history of our Society than the three that went before.

H. B.

