

Notes and Comments

THE HISTORY OF THE PLOUGH

An International Conference for Research on Ploughing Implements was held in Copenhagen in June. It was attended by some forty persons representing most European countries and the United States. Mr J. W. Y. Higgs and Mr F. G. Payne attended from Great Britain. The idea of the conference was first suggested at the fourth meeting of the International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnographical Sciences which was held in Vienna in 1952.

This was the first opportunity that international experts had had of meeting together to discuss problems relating to the history, development, and distribution of plough types, and the conference provided a most useful forum for the exchange of ideas. It was clear that in many countries great headway had been made with the study of plough types and that it was a subject which required far closer study in Great Britain. A considerable proportion of the conference was devoted to the discussion of a draft scheme for collecting information on an international basis to make available material for the compilation of an international atlas of plough types which might be published at a later date. The conference welcomed a Danish proposal to establish in the National Museum at Copenhagen a permanent bureau which would assemble information on the history of the plough from all over the world and thus establish a library and archive for the use of international research workers. It is to be hoped that everybody interested in the subject will send information which might be useful to the Secretary, Dr Axel Steensberg, The Danish National Museum, Frederiksholms Kanal 12, Copenhagen.

A committee was elected to supervise the work of the bureau, consisting of Dr Branimir Bratanić of Yugoslavia, Professor Jorge Dias of Portugal, Professor Sigurd Erixon of Sweden, Professor Heinz Kothe of East Germany, Professor Paul Leser of the U.S.A.,

Mr Ffransis Payne of Great Britain, and Dr Axel Steensberg.

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF AGRICULTURAL ECONOMISTS

The next meeting of the International Conference of Agricultural Economists will be held in Helsinki from 19 to 25 August 1954. The general theme of the conference will be 'The Impact of Technical Changes on Agriculture'. Papers and discussions will cover a wide range of subjects related to this field and although the final details of the programme are not yet available it is already clear that the meeting will not be without considerable interest to the agricultural historian. Before and after the conference tours are being arranged, so that members will have the opportunity of visiting farms and agricultural institutions in Finland and in Northern Europe. The Secretary of the Conference is Mr J. R. Currie of Wingett, Dartington, Totnes, Devon.

ALDERMASTON CANDLE AUCTION

The triennial candle auction for letting the church land at Aldermaston in Berkshire was held on 18 December 1953. The normal method of conducting an auction by candle is to insert a pin or nail a little way down the stem of a lighted candle, the last person to bid before the pin falls being the purchaser.

Such auctions as a means of selling merchandise were extremely common in the eighteenth century, when they appear to have been one of the standard methods of disposing of ships' cargoes, goods and stores of all kinds, and even of slaves. The following advertisement, for example, is taken from *Williamson's Advertiser* of Liverpool for 20 August 1756. "To be sold by the Candle, at 1 o'clock noon, at R. Williamson's shop, twelve pipes of raisin wine, two boxes of bottled cyder, six sacks of flour, three negro men, two negro women, two negro boys, and one negro girl."

'Sales by Candle' were also commonly used for the sale or letting of land and buildings. In addition to this survival at Aldermaston it is believed that such auctions still continue at Chedzoy in Somerset and Haxey in Lincolnshire. The meadow at Aldermaston is known as Church Acre and measures in area 2a. 1r. 33p. It was originally awarded to the Churchwardens in compensation for their lands, grounds, and rights of common, and the practice of letting it by candle auction is thought to date back at least as far as 1815. The money obtained for it, after the necessary fencing expenses have been paid, goes to the church funds.

The auction is something of a social occasion in the village and is well attended. The Vicar acts as auctioneer, that is to say he inserts the pin in the candle, and after it has fallen declares the purchaser. The proceedings take about twenty minutes and bids are very slow right up to the last minute or two when interest suddenly awakens and the bidding

becomes brisk until the pin falls. This time the meadow fetched 162s., which compares unfavourably with the very high price of 255s. paid in 1950.

DERBYSHIRE RAMS' HEADS

There is a well-known story about three rams which were sold by a Derbyshire farmer in the year 1830 to a farmer in Surrey. The story relates how the rams, being dissatisfied with their new home in the south, walked back north to the farm of their upbringing. The farmer, amazed by their perseverance, took compassion on them and kept them until they died of old age. After their deaths he had their heads stuffed. A member of the Society, Mr I. H. Morten of Burbage, near Buxton, has been trying for some years to verify the truth of this tale and has at last succeeded in tracing what he believes to be the original heads. Two of them are now hanging in a public house at Eyam, and the third was apparently destroyed by moths during the last war.

LEICESTERSHIRE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

The Society will publish in its *Transactions* for 1954:

CRUCK-BUILDING IN LEICESTERSHIRE

by V. R. WEBSTER

A limited number of offprints of this paper will be issued by the Society in November, price 6s. (by post 6s. 4d.). Orders should be sent to the Secretary, Leicestershire Archaeological Society, The Guildhall, Leicester, before 1 October.

STUDIES IN LEICESTERSHIRE AGRARIAN HISTORY

Edited by W. G. HOSKINS

Copies of this publication, which includes contributions by R. H. Hilton, L. A. Parker, M. W. Beresford, W. G. Hoskins, and G. E. Fussell, can still be obtained from the Secretary of the Society or through any bookseller.

Price 12s. 6d.