

Why not form a Local History Society ?

By ARTHUR OAKES, B.A.

IN 1932 six people met together to discuss the formation of a Local History Society in Bromborough which was as recently as 1914 a village: its population in 1910 was very little different from that of 1810, but at the end of the First World War, this village was scheduled for development and a start was made of the erection of some 1,000 Council houses, and this process went on uninterruptedly until 1939. The private builder also kept pace with the Council, and Bromborough, which we still call a village, became an urban district and is now part of the Borough of Bebington. Very little of the village is left and to see it as it was in 1910 needs a great effort of imagination.

A handsome row of stone Tudor cottages was demolished, the Manor Farm, another stone treasure, disappeared to make way for Irwin's shop, and later the Manor House itself followed suit and a hall associated with that illustrious Cheshire family, the Mainwarings, is no more. High Street passes through its garden and the space formerly occupied by its two great salons is a wilderness of weeds and brushwood awaiting shop and civic development. Therefore to attempt to arrest further rapid destruction and consequent decay caused this band of half a dozen people to sound the feelings of the community. From our knowledge, we were convinced there was sufficient evidence to show that the desire for such an organisation existed. A public meeting was called and the case put before the audience.

In this way, the Bromborough Society was formed, some thirty of those present enrolling as members at an annual subscription of one shilling. The subscription remained at this figure for over ten years, for the Society was fortunate in having a meeting room at the Lady Lever Art Gallery, Port Sunlight, put at its disposal rent free.

From such simple beginnings, the Bromborough Society has grown and now numbers 302 active members. Since the year 1933 it has arranged a series of lectures, six in number each winter session, and in the summer from four to six field meetings annually. It maintained this programme during the War years, several of its lectures being disturbed by air-raid warnings and the consequent gun fire, etc.

Its objects are

- (1) To encourage an interest in the past history of the locality and its present and future development.

- (2) To preserve the records, relics and amenities of the district.
- (3) To make a survey of the antiquities of the neighbourhood.
- (4) To collect material for a folk museum.
- (5) To compile a record of the outstanding transactions of the Society.

Now what has the Bromborough Society accomplished? First of all the tangible things. It has been instrumental in saving from the scrap heap several valuable sculptured stones that graced the room in which King Charles stayed at the Manor House. It rescued from oblivion a gift-fountain presented by a generous benefactor of the past, and had placed in a position of safety the Ass's Head, the crest of the Mainwarings, and the headstone of the Bromborough Market Cross of 1278. When Stanhope House, a sandstone Stuart Building dating from 1693, was about to be razed to the ground to make way for a housing estate, the Bromborough Society intervened and was able to stay the demolition. The building now houses the local library.

The Society has made an extensive collection of photographs, newspaper cuttings, etc. of things of the past; it has amassed a great number of reference books and has in its possession, the nucleus of a folk museum. The Annual Report of its proceedings increases in volume each year.

Of the intangible results of the efforts of the Society, the chief are:—

- (1) The joy it has given to people who were no longer active enough for strenuous outdoor pursuits by providing them with another interest.
- (2) The curiosity it has aroused in them about the things around them which has encouraged them to make a study of some field of local history so that many of them have become real masters of the subject.
- (3) Through a common centre of interest it has developed an organisation where snobbishness and cliquishness are non-existent and where disparity of social position and age is forgotten.

Has it been a worthwhile undertaking? Yes, it has. Why not start one in your locality?

