The Old Ashmolean, Oxford

By T. E. JAMES

IN celebration of the occasion of the two hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the Old Ashmolean, Oxford, which falls on May 21, a series of events has been arranged. Addresses will be presented on May 22, by delegates of scientific and literary institutions, whilst a lecture is announced for the same day by Sir Arthur Smith Woodward on "Plot and Lhwyd and the Dawn of Geology". This will be delivered in the University Museum. Various exhibitions which are of cognate interest in connexion with the anniversary will be available to the public.

As an event of importance in the history of early science in Great Britain, but more particularly, perhaps, in relation to natural history, it is well and fitting to look back and recall the mode of origin of the Old Ashmolean. Time has changed much that was characteristic of this institution, leaving it now, one might almost say, no more than a dignified relic of the past. There is also something to record that is needful, respecting Elias Ashmole, the founder of the original *Musaeum Ashmoleanum*.

"Alumni Oxonienses" supplies a conveniently brief and helpful summary, where space is limited, of the main features of Ashmole's varied career. It runs:—"Born Lichfield 23 May, 1617. Educated Lichfield Grammar School. A chorister of Lichfield Cathedral; solicitor in Chancery, 1638; of Clement's Inn, 1640; an Attorney of the Court of Common Pleas, 1640; a Captain in Lord Ashley's regiment of foot at Worcester, 1646; barrister-at-law of the Middle Temple, 1660. Windsor Herald, 1660. Chief Controller of H.M. Excise in England and Wales, 1668. D.Med., by diploma (Oxon), 1669—." The anniversary of Ashmole's date of birth thus falls on the day after Sir A. Smith Woodward's promised lecture. Ashmole died on May 18, 1692, and he was interred in South Lambeth Church, where a black marble slab commemorates him in eulogistic terms. He had married three times, his third wife (1668) being the daughter of Sir William Dugdale.

Elias Ashmole, "skilled in chemistry, antiquities, heraldry, mathematics", and other abstruse studies, including alchemy and astrology, was among those persons, who, on May 20, 1663, were registered, and declared to be original fellows of the Royal Society, following upon the incorporating Charter of July 15, 1662. Ashmole's name, however, was included in that earlier and historic list of supporters of a proposed new society, whose declaration ran—"Wee whose names are underwritten doe consent and agree that wee will meete together weekly . . . to consult and debate, concerning the promoting of Experimentall Learning". This was dated, in the first instance, December 5, 1660, but names were appended after that

particular date. On December 26, 1660, there is a minute that "Mr. Boyle, Mr. Henry Oldenburg, Mr. John Denham, Mr. Rawlins, Mr. Elias Ashmole, Mr. John Evelyn, and Nathaniel Henshaw, M.D., were proposed candidates for election". The association of Ashmole with these pioneer promoters of the new philosophy is of special though incidental interest. Ashmole not only signed the document quoted above, but also the Charter Book, when that fellowship roll was received and inscribed by original fellows as for 1663.

Hence, the Royal Society has two testifying signatures of Elias Ashmole. In election he preceded Edmund Waller and Abraham Cowley. On the other hand, Ashmole never served on the Council; nor did he appear to advance any schemes at hand. But he had divers interests and occupations as just excuse. Still, as regards activities in early science at Gresham College, or at Arundel House, Ashmole is a disappointing study.

In other directions, however, Ashmole's personal equipage was assured. On June 18, 1660, he was introduced to the presence of King Charles II by no less a functionary than Thomas Chaffinch; and on the next day he was constituted Windsor Herald. When that folio on the History of the Most Noble Order of the Garter was published (1672), it was brought to the King by Ashmole.

We may now briefly consider Ashmole's connexion with the Old Ashmolean, and how it came to be established at Oxford, where scientific studies had already begun. On one of the rural sides of London, at South Lambeth, there had been established, by 1629, an extensive botanic garden, an adjunct to a residence, the latter a repository for 'rarities' in natural history. It was the home of John Tradescant, whom we hear of as married in 1607 at Meopham, in Kent. First as a gardener helping to stock the Hatfield demesne, next, he is travelling abroad and collecting assiduously, encouraged and stimulated by the Duke of Buckingham. It was the Duke's wish (so wrote Tradescant in 1625), that "I should deal with all merchants from all places". The South Lambeth house came, in time, to be known by the suggestive title of 'Tradescant's Ark'; its collections were noteworthy in the infancy of the study of natural history in England.

John Tradescant, son and heir, was imbued with his father's tastes and likings, and he carried on the collecting work at Lambeth when his father died in 1637. A decade or so later, we find that Ashmole was a frequent visitor across the Thames, and became very friendly with John Tradescant. In 1659 a diary entry by Ashmole records, "Mr. Tradescant and his wife told me they had been long considering upon whom to bestow their

Closet of Curiosities when they died, and at last had resolved to give it unto me".

After the death of John, the husband (1662), acute trouble arose in regard to the collections, settled, however, by Lord Chancellor Clarendon, in 1664, in favour of Ashmole, who was to "have and enjoy" the collection of rarities. Ashmole was then living in a house next to the Tradescants.

After Ashmole had obtained possession of the repository there came a period (about 1677), when it was urgently necessary to assign its contents. There were also certain manuscripts and books thought worthy. It was no use to cast eyes towards Gresham College. It was therefore not unreasonable, he thought, to offer his possessions to Oxford, his *alma mater*, but *conditionally* on the erection of a building to house them. He had been much honoured there in 1669 as a "curioso and virtuoso". Certainly a bold proposition, all things considered; nevertheless, it was gratefully accepted. Thereafter, the Ashmolean building took shape and became the designated habitation, erected at the charge of the University, fulfilling, at least in some measure, Ashmole's original hopes.* The foundation stone was laid on Thursday, May 15, 1679,

and the Museum was opened on May 21, 1683. The Duke and Duchess of York, and their retinue, attended. There was feasting and jollity, and Ashmole (with whom was Mrs. Ashmole) was applauded and favoured to the top of his bent. Dr. Plot, the first custodian, gave a "sette speech". After the chief ceremony, the company went down to a newly fitted chemical "elaboratorie", where they witnessed some experiments, which are recorded as having given great satisfaction. A revival of the activities of the philosophers forming the Philosophical Society of Oxford, the original members of which had close contact with the Royal Society in London, occurring, their meetings were held in the Ashmolean for some time, and were both profitable and inspiring.

Space will not allow reference to the vicissitudes which later waited upon the Old Ashmolean, ending in neglect and disrepair. Dr. R. T. Gunther has dealt with these points, and of a brighter period, bringing in its train appreciation of new uses and recognition of the historic past.

* On January 26, 1678/9, a fire in the Middle Temple destroyed Ashmole's library, and many curios, in all probability, destined for Oxford.

Obituary

THE DUKE OF THE ABRUZZI

FEW men have led lives so full of interest and accomplishment as Prince Luigi of Savoy, Duke of the Abruzzi, who died on March 18 at the age of sixty years. Mariner, explorer, admiral, colonist, and man of science, he exhibited vision and initiative in every field of his numerous activities, and, by sheer tenacity of purpose, achieved success in the most arduous of ventures.

The Duke's connexion with the Italian navy commenced in 1879 when, at the age of six, he entered the service as cabin boy. From 1884 until 1889 he was occupied in study at the Royal Naval Academy. In those days Italy was not very well known in foreign countries and, to remedy this, the ships of the navy were sent on missionary work to distant lands and even round the whole world. Such patriotic propaganda found an enthusiastic supporter in the young Prince who, in the *Amerigo Vespucci*, the *Volturmo*, and the *Cristoforo Colombo*, took part in several long voyages, ultimately attaining the rank of lieutenant. His first important naval command, in 1902, was that of the cruiser *Liguria*, in which he made a tour of the world lasting eighteen months. Further promotions followed, and the Duke commanded a squadron during the Italo-Turkish war of 1911-12, and was appointed to the supreme command of the Italian navy during the War.

As a traveller and explorer, the services of the Duke of the Abruzzi to science and to his country were outstanding. His early education in this direction was acquired during his teens in the Alps under the guidance of the well-known alpinist, Francesco Gonella. The Alps were also

the scene of many of his later ascents and before he reached the age of thirty he had climbed, in some cases during the winter, all the most difficult Alpine peaks, some of which had not been previously conquered.

During his world-tour of 1894-96, the Duke saw the Himalayas for the first time and on his return to Italy he made preparations for an ascent of Nanga Parbat (8,115 metres). This expedition was, however, frustrated owing to an outbreak of plague and famine, which decimated the Punjab. The objective was therefore changed to a peak very different in character, Mount St. Elias in Alaska. Unlike Nanga Parbat, with a lower snow limit at about 5,000 metres, Mount St. Elias is covered from base to summit with glaciers, which debouch into the waters of the Pacific. The mountain—which is visible from the sea at a distance of 200 miles and has been known to navigators since the beginning of the eighteenth century—and its immediate surroundings were at that time completely unexplored. The expedition, consisting of the Duke and five companions, together with four Alpine guides, left Italy in May, 1897, and was joined at Yakutat Bay by ten American porters. Three days were occupied in crossing the wide plateau of the Malaspina glacier, and four laborious weeks in traversing the Seward, Agassiz, and Newton glaciers, fissured by enormous crevasses. Just over ten weeks after leaving Italy, the party camped beyond the Newton glacier at the foot of the great pyramidal mass of the mountain, and less than three days later reached the summit without casualty.

The observations made gave the altitude of