The History of Maidenhead.

By P. H. Ditchfield, M.A., F.S.A.

WE are told that Maidenhead cannot boast of a long or stirring history, and that it is but a child of its older neighbours, Cookham, Bray and Taplow. If that be so, it may be said to be a somewhat sturdy infant, and to have thriven amazingly in recent years.

It is situated in the Hundred of Bray, and was in early times known as South Elington. Leland states that the town of Maidenhead standeth a pretty distance from the Thames side and is mostly well-builded. The South side of the town is in the Parish of Bray ; the North side is in the Parish of Cookham. But before it began to assume a separate entity and blossomed out into a fair town, having a Corporation of its own, it may be well to try to discover traces of the various peoples who have made this soil their homes, and who have left evidences of their presence behind them in the shape of tools, weapons, earth-works or buildings.

Of the presence of pre-historic races there is no lack of evidence. A very large number of flint axes, lance-heads, arrow-heads, scrapers and flakes, have been found in this neighbourhood, and also numerous implements of bronze. At Hedsor, a few years ago, the remains of a pile dwelling were discovered, and doubtless there were many others on the wide lagoon which spread its placid waves from Castle Hill to the foot of Taplow Hill. Pit-dwellings have been found near here on Maidenhead Thicket and at Hitcham, where Mr. Rutland saw several circles containing food vessels, drinking cups, cinerary urns and bones of domestic animals. A bronze sickle has been found at Bray. At Amerden, four fine bronze leaf-shaped swords, bronze celts, rapier, knife, sheath, have been dredged from the river, and also a valuable specimen of an iron sword in a bronze sheath. Several swords have been dredged from the Thames at Maidenhead bridge, evidences of early combats which were fought long before, or just before, the dawn of history. In Celtic times, before the advent of the Romans, this County was inhabited by the

Bibroci, who were subdued by the Romans, and were among the first of the Celtic tribes to lay down their arms at the feet of the Conqueror. The earthworks on Maidenhead Thicket, near the pit dwellings, to which I have already alluded, are evidences of their struggle with the power of Rome. They consist of a bold embankment about 5ft. high, 10ft. in diameter, and 80 yards long. Its form is curved and is evidently the remains of a circular fort, and is undoubtedly of British origin. On the opposite side of the Thicket is a large quadrangular entrenchment, and is of Roman origin. Robin Hood's arbour, a smaller earthwork, is evidently a kind of outpost to the principal encampment. The existence of these Celtic and Roman earthworks side by side is evidence of the struggle between the two nations, and tells us plainer than words can say that the Bibroci did not give up their liberties and hearths and homes without a good fight. There are many evidences of the presence of the all-conquering Romans at Maidenhead, Leland states that it was the Roman city of *Alauno dunum*, but where he got his information no man knoweth. As far as I am aware, the name does not occur in any of the Roman Itineraries. But whether or not there ever was such a town, Maidenhead was an important place in Roman times. There is first the evidence of roads. A Roman road ran from Braywick to Cockmarsh in Cookham, through Staverton Lodge, where coins have been found. The House stands on the road. The roads passed through the town ; I believe St. Luke's Church stands upon it, and Mr. Rutland has traced its course, and also Mr. Kerry, in his *Hundred* of Bray, describes it. I have never traversed it, but I am told that its course is very clearly defined in several places.

Tumuli are often found in the vicinity of Roman roads. There are two at Cockmarsh, one of which has been opened, and Mr. Cocks, of Marlow, found therein the umbo of a shield, with burnt earth pottery and other remains. Antiquaries like Mr. Rutland and others have been very busy with their spades, and they have dug in a fruitful soil. Near the residence of our esteemed Member of Parliament, Mr. Gardner, at Spencer's, there is an earthwork, a raised plateau fortified by ditches and vallum, and our Member is the fortunate possessor of a fine first brass coin of Antoninus, found near this spot. Bray abounds in old Roman coins. But the most striking discovery of the settlement of the Conquerors is that of the Roman villa at the Firs, Castle Hill, the residence of Mr. Silver. Excavations were made in 1886 under the careful conduct of Mr.

Rutland, and he found a large and important house, with hypocausts for heating the chambers, a complete bath, and all the arrangements of comfort and luxury which the prosperous and luxurious Roman loved to surround himself. Coins, Samian ware, amphorœ, dishes, vases, cooking, food, and drinking vessels galore, he had left behind him for Mr. Rutland to discover. A Roman quern, or hand corn mill, was found near. Several pieces of plaster with remains of mural decorations were discovered, and doubtless if the patterns on them were compared with those found at Pompeii we should see that whereas the Italian artist depicted the picturesque vineyards of his native land, our British decorator represented the no less beautiful waving corn fields familiar to Englishmen. Antiquaries owe a great debt to Mr. Silver for causing the excavations to be made, the entire cost of which was defrayed by him.

Of Saxon times there is not so much evidence, though the name Elington seems to show that there was a Saxon Settlement here, and across the river at Taplow Mr. Rutland found one of the finest Saxon tumulus which has ever been discovered in England. The contents of the tumulus are deposited in the British Museum, and the case in which they are exhibited is one of the most attractive in the Anglo Saxon section.

The name South Elington (the ton, town or fortified settlement of the family or followers of El) survived until 1296. (By the way the place did not derive its name from the family of Elynden as some suppose, but the family from the place). After that date the name Maidenhuth came into use, in various forms, such as Maidenheith, Maydenhead. The explanation of hythe is simple enough. It signifies a wharf, and according to Isaac Taylor, Maidenhythe or Middenhithe signifies the midway wharf between Marlow and Windsor. More probably it is the May-den or fortified hill overlooking the wharf or hythe.

Edmund, in his Names of Places, conjectures (somewhat improbably) that it was connected with Maid, the Virgin Mary, and Leland says it derived its name from the head of one of the eleven thousand virgins, who accompanied St. Ursula and were slaughtered by the Pagans at Cologne. I need not pause to explain the origin of that myth and tell how the Saint's name, St. Undecemilla, Virgin Martyr, was corrupted into the form Undecem millia (11000 virgins and martyrs); nor need I say that Maidenhead in Berkshire has no connection with this strange and curious legend.

The birth of Maidenhead may be attributed to the building of bridge. Previous to its erection the crossing of the river Thames was effected by a ferry at Balham, and the great western road to Reading, Gloucester and Bristol went through Cookham. After the building of the bridge the traffic was diverted from Burnham and Cookham, and caused Maidenhead to increase in prosperity and importance. Camden says that after the town "had built here a bridge upon piles it began to have inns, and to be so frequented as to out-vie its neighbouring mother, Bray, a much more ancient place." The first bridge was built about 1280, so that it can claim a long history. Camden says it was built in 1460, but this is evidently an error, as in 1297 (Pat. Rolls, Edw. I.), a grant was made for its repair. These are the words :—"Grant at the instance of Will. de Berford in aid of the bridge of Maidenhead which is almost broken down, of pontage (tolls) for 3 years, to be taken by the hands of 2 good and lawful men appointed by. him." In 1335 there was a grant made to the bailiffs and good men of Maidenhead of pontage for 3 years on wares passing under or over the bridge of their town. Some years later the good citizens of London complained of the grasping nature of the good folk of Maidenhead who demanded exorbitant tolls for the passing of their bridge. Excessive charges seem to have been a weakness of old Maidenhead folk. The landlord of the Bull in 1459 is presented for taking exorbitant gains. Alice Buckland of the same inn does the same. John Francis of Old Bear in 1489 charges an unlawful price for provisions. This failing doubtless modern Maidenhead tradesmen have carefully corrected.

As was not unusual in mediæval times a chapel was connected with the bridge. Old bridges were rather perilous structures, and travellers would often wish to pray for a safe passage, or to give thanks for their secure crossing. This chapel was originally built by the family of Hosebund about 1270. In 1304, one Theobald de Thingden was presented to the Church of Elyndon, void by the resignation of Robert de Harvedon, the presentation being in the hands of the King by reason of the voidance of the see of Winchester. In 1352, John Hosebund, citizen and corn-dealer of London, left money for the endowment of a chantry, for one priest in the chapel of St. Andrew and St. Mary Magdalene to pray year by year for the souls of himself, and of Richd. Bride and Margery his wife. An arrangement was made with the Prior and Convent of Hurley to find and maintain this chaplain. The Chapel was taken

down and rebuilt in 1724, but on account of the obstruction it occasioned to the great western road it was again taken down and rebuilt in 1824.

Returning to the bridge we find that in the time of Henry VI. it was in a very ruinous condition, and that on account of the great dangers which the liege subjects of the King encountered both as to their lives and their goods and chattels, they preferred crossing by means of the ferry ; and then *the Guild of St. Andrew and St. Mary Magdalene* was formed in 1452 for the repair and maintenance of the bridge.   Thomas Metingham, Priest of the Chantry, to which I have alluded, petitioned King Henry VI. to grant his license for the establishment of a Guild in the chapel, to be called " The overseers, wardens, brothers and sisters of the Fraternity or Guild of St. Andrew and St. Mary Magdalene of Maidenheth."   The duties of the Guild were to maintain the chantry and find wax lights for it, and to repair the bridge, which was exceedingly dangerous.   They were to have a common seal, and take toll for the repair of the bridge.   This Guild was the ancestor of the present Corporation. It shared the fate of other similar institutions at the time of the Reformation, on the ground of its superstitious usages, and was dissolved in 1547.   It was revived 30 years later, and in 1581 Queen Elizabeth granted to the town a Charter of Incorporation.   The governing body succeeded to all the duties of the ancient guild, except that all religious obligations with regard to the Chapel were abandoned, and it consisted of one warden, two bridgemasters, and 8 burgesses.   The second Charter was obtained from James I. in 1604, the third was granted by Charles II. in 1663, the fourth by James II. in 1685, when the warden was superseded by the Mayor. The present constitution was framed in accordance with the Municipal Reform Act of 1836.   The old Guildhall being in a ruinous condition was pulled down in 1777, and a new one erected, when Abraham Darby was Mayor, and James Payn, Town Clerk, at a cost of £1330.

The Corporation Seal is curious.   It is evidently the seal of a foreign ecclesiastic (so states the late Sir Wolleston Franks) and has nothing to do with Maidenhead.   The inscription is Sigillum Iohannis Godayn Canonici Thiernensis (the seal of John Godayn, Canon of Thiers).   How it came to be used as the official seal of Maidenhead no man knoweth.   The old Town Mace, too, is interesting.   It dates, I believe, from the time of Charles II.   It was at

one time lost, or stolen, and then discovered in a broken condition ; it has been skilfully repaired.

And now we will go back to our Bridge. Certain historical associations are connected with it. When Henry IV. had won his crown by the right of his trusty sword, certain noblemen, followers of Richard II., raised an insurrection against him. Amongst them were the Earls of Rutland, Kent and Huntingdon, and Lord Spencer. They assembled an army of about 40,000 men and tried to catch the King at Windsor ; but unfortunately for them he had received warning of their purpose and had retired in the direction of London, where he raised an army. The conspirators retreated. The Earl of Kent fell back on Maidenhead, took his stand there, and held the bridge until all the army had safely crossed. For three days he defended Maidenhead, and was at length obliged to retreat on the arrival of the King. We need not follow the fate of these luckless conspirators, who were all executed with the barbarities usual in that age.

Again the bridge appears in the page of history. It was fortified in 1688 to impede the approach of the Prince of Orange who was marching on London, and was held by an Irish regiment. But the people of Maidenhead were ever inspired by a playful humour. In the dead of night they beat a Dutch march, which so alarmed the Irish soldiers that they took to their heels and left their guns and cannon behind them. The last chapter of the eventful history of the bridge was written in 1772, when the present magnificent stone structure was erected from designs by Sir Robert Taylor at a cost of £19,000, a finely written account of which may be seen in the muniments of your Corporation. The other bridge, by which the iron steeds cross the Thames, was designed by the celebrated Sir Isambard Brunel.

Although the bridge greatly improved the means of traffic through Berkshire all dangers were not over when it was safely crossed. Maidenhead Thicket was a fearsome place infested by robbers and highwaymen. As early as 1255 an order was made for widening the road between Maidenhead and Henley-on-Thames by removing the trees and brushwood on each side. In the time of Elizabeth the number of robberies was so great that the inhabitants of the Hundred of Beynhurst, in which the thicket stands, were specially exempted from penalties when there had been no voluntary default ; and in the same reign the Vicar of Hurley, who served the

cure at Maidenhead, was allowed an extra salary for the danger of passing the thicket.

There are yet one or two other historical events connected with the town. At the old Greyhound Inn in 1647 Charles I. was allowed by his Roundhead captors to meet his children. The town was strewn with flowers and decked with green boughs, showing the loyalty of the people of Maidenhead to the falling throne. They dined together, and drove to Caversham where the King was held a prisoner at Caversham Park. Tradition tells, too, of James I.'s dinner with the Vicar of Bray and his curate, how the King, who was incognito, could not pay, how the Vicar indignantly refused to pay for him, how the curate readily complied, and was rewarded with a Canonry of Windsor.

The Roman City of Silchester.

A Lecture by W. H. St. John Hope, Esq., Secretary of the Society of Antiquaries.

In the year 1890 some antiquaries, anxious to know what a Romano-British town was like, formed themselves into a Committee to excavate the site of Silchester, of which the Roman name was Calleva Atrebatum. A great deal was known previously about the military side of the Roman occupation of Britain—the great wall in the North, the stations of the legions, and the lines of road connecting them—but little or nothing was known of the civil side of the occupation—of the sites and approximate areas of the towns, or of the characteristics of the buildings, except as regards a few isolated structures. In their excavations the Committee had been cordially assisted by the late and present Dukes of Wellington, the lords of the soil, and by Mr. Edward Cooper and Mr. Lush, the tenants. The site early attracted the attention