

# PROCEEDINGS

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## Cambridge Antiquarian Society.

26 OCTOBER 1914—24 MAY 1915

WITH

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ON SOME OBJECTS FOUND IN THE KING'S DITCH UNDER  
THE MASONIC HALL.

By Professor T. MCKENNY HUGHES, M.A., F.R.S., F.S.A.

(Read November 30, 1914.)

When we examine the plans of fortified towns in such a country as the Netherlands, for instance, we cannot fail to be struck by the great number of watercourses and ditches, natural and artificial, by which they are surrounded and intersected. The towns were often built on the banks of a river so as to command an important ford or bridge, sometimes in a loop of the river so as to be almost surrounded by it. Old channels and artificial cuts or lodes, facilitated the carriage of goods to the town and even up to hithes and wharves within it, and smaller ditches separated and protected properties and provided drainage. Old plans of Ghent and Sas van Ghent, of Brisac and Fort Louis on the Rhine, of Strasburg, Arras, and Valenciennes show the use made of water boundaries.

Cambridge was a town in a low country and on a meandering river, so that it was not difficult to turn water into it from the river above it and let it out again below the town. There were spurs and outliers of gravel and, in the depressions between these, ditches were easily dug around all dry sites suitable for building on. The ditches in the Backs are examples of enclosing water-boundaries taken sometimes along still recognisable old river courses, as behind Queens' and St John's, and modified and straightened, or even joined by new cuts, as behind King's, Clare, Trinity Hall and Trinity.

I have already<sup>1</sup> drawn attention to the occurrence of numerous ditches in Cambridge within that commonly called the King's Ditch and referred to the time of Henry III. But all that he did was to order that the great Ditch of the Town

<sup>1</sup> *Proc. Camb. Ant. Soc.*, Vol. VIII, Jan. 25, 1892, p. 32; *ib.* Oct. 23, 1893, p. 255; *ib.* Feb. 1897; Vol. IX, 1893, p. 370.

should be cleaned and the associated watercourses should be reopened, which implies that they were in existence before his time. Moreover we read that King John commanded the Barons of the Exchequer to allow the Bailiffs of Cambridge the costs they had incurred in enclosing the town, which, in the absence of any evidence of walls or fortifications, we may safely infer was by means of a moat or ditch.

Within this enclosing ditch there must have been many pre-existing moats and drains around monastic, municipal, and private buildings. Before the town had grown to its present size, with the inevitable accompaniment of over-crowded buildings covering the central parts, converted watercourses and artificial ditches prevailed everywhere, and, where there was no access to these, cesspools and rubbish pits took their place for sanitary purposes. We find all these wherever excavations are carried on in the older part of the town, but from the nature of the case the remains found in them are of all ages from the time when they were first opened to the time when they were finally closed.

Most of these old ditches have long been filled up and built over, though some were still open within the memory of man. But every now and then in the course of cutting drains, digging foundations and similar operations we are given opportunities of collecting all the odds and ends buried in the mud which accumulated in them. From these we can learn much of the domestic life of Cambridge from soon after the Conquest to the present day.

In the first-named communication (footnote, p. 16) I gave a reproduction of Lynes' plan of the ditch in 1572 and of a portion of the ordnance map showing the position of the principal ditches, and pointed out that the King's Ditch was taken along ground that lent itself to the work, because it was low and for part of its course was the natural outfall of the water issuing from the gravel beds on the east of the town.

In those earlier papers I have also given such full descriptions and illustrations of the objects discovered that it is not necessary to do more now than refer to them in such terms as will enable anyone to examine the types.

There are however generally some new points of interest and objects of new type in every new excavation.

The ditches were nearer to the houses in one place than in another and were cleaned out oftener in one place than another and the class of building was different on different sites. Therefore we find different kinds of things in different ditches and different parts of the same ditch, and we cannot expect to find and we do not find everywhere exactly the same succession of objects to which we can assign a date.

Our difficulties are increased by the fact that, when these ditches were cleaned out, the mud was spread over the margin, especially where there were gardens, and the infilling began anew. There are therefore near these ditches layers containing all sorts of mediæval objects, those first thrown out being of course the newest. They are however generally mixed and confused and often the succession is reversed, while many a fragment lying on the surface or dug out in earlier times is thrown into the ditch in later times. Experience however soon teaches us to detect these sources of error.

I have already<sup>1</sup> described the gradual extension of the area available for building and the dispersal of objects over the sites.

We must bear these cautions in mind when we are examining any part of the King's Ditch, as this appears to have been the principal outfall for all the ditches in the ancient town. The first precise mention we have of it is, as shown above, that Henry III ordered it to be cleaned. We have another in the Cambridge Town Treasurer's Accounts for 1515 (?)<sup>2</sup> where there is mention of "The costs and charges of the Klynsyng of the Kyngs ditche in Cambrigge and the ditche by Pembroke Halle and other ditches belongyng to the Towne." It is also described as "the ditche ageinst Pembrokehale."

This is especially interesting in examining the portion now brought under the notice of the Society, as this is within a stone's throw of Pembroke and explains what struck us in examining the excavation, namely, that it appeared to have been

<sup>1</sup> *Proc. Camb. Ant. Soc.*, Vol. xi, p. 393.

<sup>2</sup> Bowtell ms., Downing Coll.

dug into more than once and never to have been completely cleared out to the bottom.

The portion of the ditch now described was exposed in digging the foundations for the Masonic Hall extension in the early part of 1914.

I take the opportunity of acknowledging the courtesy of the Architect, Mr Macalister, and the builders, Messrs Negus, and their foreman in giving me every opportunity for observing and collecting.

The site is on the east of Slaughter, or Slaughter House, Lane, and the portion of the ditch exposed is in immediate continuation of that which we have already had opportunities of examining as it crossed the old Physic Garden. Buildings had not encroached upon the area through which the ditch here ran until quite late times, as shown by the recent character of the foundations exposed in the excavation, and here or hereabouts it must have received the body of water still running out of Downing Grounds but recently diverted further and further west by the erection of large buildings over that area.

A deep ditch was found under the north-west corner of the Archaeological Museum. It was between eleven and twelve feet in depth and the same in width and was filled with black mud in which were bones of horses and other domestic animals. In fact it was very like the King's Ditch in every respect; and along its continuation, that is along some watercourse that ran from the Downing Grounds, I take it the King's Ditch was carried. When we follow the King's Ditch beyond the area thickly covered with houses where it was straightened, as is clearly shown in Lynes' plan, it winds about like a natural stream, confirming the suggestion that the artificial ditch cut through a bank from the King's Mill to Pembroke College, and beyond that was taken along low marshy ground with a stream running through it from Pascal Close (Downing) to the river.

In wet weather the water used to rise through the gravel and I have often seen a small lake on the west side of Downing Grounds beyond where the School of Agriculture now stands. The last place where I saw a large body of water flowing north

out of that area was at a depth of more than 12 feet under the School of Chemistry, immediately west of the entrance archway.

It seems pretty clear that there was a constant supply of water running into the King's Ditch from these sources, and also exceptional means of flushing it by turning in a larger body of water from the Nine Wells and from the river at Grantchester and Newnham.

I exhibit specimens of current sorted material and fresh-water shells from the ditch. The oysters, mussels and cockles were obviously thrown in with the household rubbish.

There do not seem to have been any buildings of importance near that part of the ditch from which the remains to which I now call your attention could have been procured. The Augustinian Friary was some distance off on the west and north, and there did not appear to be any accumulation suggestive of a slaughter-house; indeed I do not know what could remain in such a case, as the solid parts of the animals slaughtered would be carried away to be consumed elsewhere.

There were however some things in connection with the relative numbers and characters of the bones which require explanation. There was an extraordinary number of horses' heads, considering the small area from which they were procured. I counted over thirty heads. I examined the more perfect to see whether I could detect how they were killed but only in one case could I find anything to make it probable that they had been poll-axed; and we are left to suggest that they were bled to death, as animals intended for food should be. As I have often pointed out before, all the excavations I have seen force the inference upon me that horses were commonly used for food down to quite recent times: their bones were broken in just the same way as those of oxen and sheep, and were scattered in the kitchen refuse just as they were.

There was very little variety in the breed. They all belonged to a small fine-boned breed with a small muzzle, and seemed to me to resemble in size and form the small Normandy horses now improved almost off the face of the earth by being

crossed with larger animals chiefly for military purposes. They were quite unlike the strong cart-horse of to-day.

They bear however a close resemblance to some of the small breeds found in the alluvium of our district, and I exhibit one from 15 feet down in the alluvium near Ely which bears this out.

They were generally young healthy animals.

There are however among the bones some vertebrae ankylosed and covered deep with osseous overgrowth, whether traumatic or rheumatic I leave to others to decide.

In the Sedgwick Museum I have a similarly diseased bone which I exhibited to the Society on a former occasion, and which then so greatly interested Sir George Humphry. Near it may be seen the paddle of a Plesiosaurus which had been affected in the same way. One ox also had suffered from disease or injury as shown by the exostosis which covers the bone.

The remains of ox are less numerous than those of horse, and all belong to that mixed and unstable breed which was originally the result of the cross of the small native short-horn with the larger animal with up-turned horns brought over by the Romans.

In later times they were locally modified by the large and long-horned breeds introduced from Sleswig-Holstein and elsewhere on the continent.

Oxen were in those days more commonly used for draft and general agricultural work, and in quite recent times the best beef was supposed to be that of oxen which had been worked up to the age of five years or so.

There were a few dogs thrown in, most of them of a powerful breed like a mastiff, and one or two of a small breed with a protuberant brow like a King Charles' Spaniel, only larger.

The sheep were almost all horned and of the same size and type as the cross-breeds now seen in the north and west of the island.

As they are found with kitchen rubbish we are of course not likely to find the remains of old animals, and therefore have no example of the horns of a full grown ram.

We often find the sheep's heads split indicating that they

had provided that very tasty dish "Sheep's head," as we know it.

But in this case the heads were whole with the horns sawn off, which suggests a different method of dressing. In this the head was cooked in its skin, the wool being first clipped and then singed off, as is done in feathering a duck. I cannot help connecting the common occurrence of small shears with kitchen rubbish to this process (see p. 26).

We learn from Walter Scott<sup>1</sup> that this method of dressing a sheep's head prevailed in Scotland long after it had been given up in Cambridge.

When Bailie Jarvie invites Frank Osbaldistone "to come back and take part o' his family-chack" where "there wad be a leg o' mutton, and it might be a tup's head, for they were in season." The delicacy however as there cooked was not so highly appreciated by the Bailie's guests as might have been expected, for we read that "Mr Jarvie presided with great glee and hospitality, compelling however Owen and myself to do rather more justice to the Scottish dainties with which his board was charged, than was quite agreeable to our southern palates. I escaped pretty well, from having those habits of society which enable one to elude this species of well-meant persecution. But it was ridiculous enough to see Owen, whose ideas of politeness were more rigorous and formal; and who was willing in all acts of lawful compliance, to evince his respect for the friend of the firm, eating, with rueful complaisance, mouthful after mouthful of singed wool, and pronouncing it excellent in a tone in which disgust almost overpowered civility." And further on in the encounter at the clachan of Aberfoil, when Bailie Jarvie defended himself with a red hot coulter used as a poker and burned the plaid of the Highlander opposed to him, he exclaims, "figh, she smells like a singit sheep's head." And we get a further insight into the process where Rob Roy exclaims, "The curse of Cromwell on me, if I wad hae wished better sport than to see Cousin Nicol Jarvie singe Inverach's plaid, like a sheep's head between a pair of

<sup>1</sup> *Rob Roy*, Chapters xxiv, xxvi, xxxiv.

tongs," tup's head and sheep's head being apparently indifferently used.

There was not a large quantity of pottery, but what was found was of diverse age and character. There was very little that could be referred to a date so remote as thirteenth or fourteenth century, and there were none of the globose vessels in dark grey earthenware with the rim strongly bent back and, as I have already pointed out, otherwise modified and showing every stage in the gradual change from the Roman type<sup>1</sup>.

If this part of the ditch ran through cultivated land such as gardens or allotments it might well be that then as now the cleanings of ditches, not only close by but further afield also, were carried on to the area to raise and enrich the soil, and thus objects of much greater antiquity and belonging to different conditions might be picked off the beds and thrown into the ditch. We shall see by and by other reasons for suspecting this.

Of later earthenware there were many fragments, but little that could be restored. It all seemed as if it had been much knocked about and the pieces far separated.

There are numerous fragments of the rough crock or pot which had the round base, due to sagging, cured by a pinch given to the margin here and there or even a sort of calkin added to it, and there are the more finished well-baked vessels in which the pinched base seems to have been unnecessary for use but was continued by way of ornament.

There are fragments of various cooking utensils, stewing pots on feet, frying pans, and chafing dishes, all of earthenware.

Of table ware there was a larger assortment. Jugs and mugs of black or brown glazed ware often with a yellow slip pattern; a good many tall, two handled, drinking vessels and some small three handled cups (tigs). Some larger vessels show clearly the development of the rose pattern which was originally merely a method of attaching separate pieces such as spouts or handles or stands, by pinching them on. The hollow cylinders seen attached to some were merely a lightened

<sup>1</sup> "The early Potters' Art in Britain," *Archaeological Journal*, Vol. LIX, 1902, No. 235, p. 219.

handle and not intended for use as a spout, and some do not run through into the interior of the vessel.

One short hollow stand in red earthenware with the bottom of the upper compartment knocked out may have been a salt-cellar or a lamp.

There is a great variety of white, blue, yellow, combed, splashed, and spotted, stone ware. Some resembles crackly china perhaps only in the case of vessels kept on or by the fire.

It is interesting to see the persistence of the old wheel-with-spokes stamp on some of the coarse red earthen glazed pottery of quite the more recent types, as also on the brass plate.

The most curious piece I have found is a fragment of a large vessel in grey coarse ware with a number of stems of tobacco pipes lying side by side in it obliquely to the rim, as if intended to hold it up while being fired. The stems resemble those of the pipes found here and there in the upper part of the deposits, and do not any of them appear to be earlier than the second half of the seventeenth century. (Plate I.)

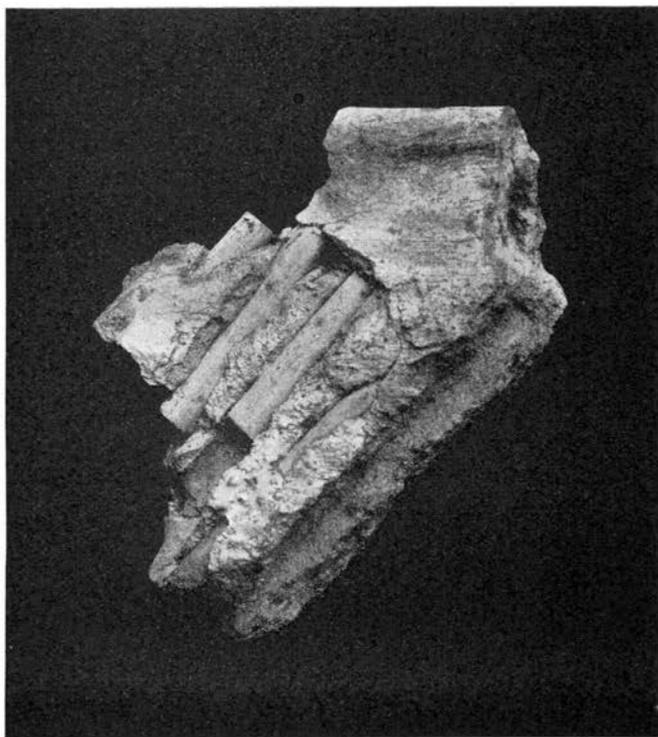
There is a considerable quantity of Cologne ware or grey-beards.

There are many small pieces of stained glass, mostly having the colour brushed on and burnt in, but some few bits being whole-coloured glass. If this was far from any buildings of importance it confirms the suggestion that rubbish from other areas was laid on the ground and fragments of all kinds picked off the land and thrown into the ditch—the nearest probable source being the Augustinian Monastery or the Church of St Bene't.

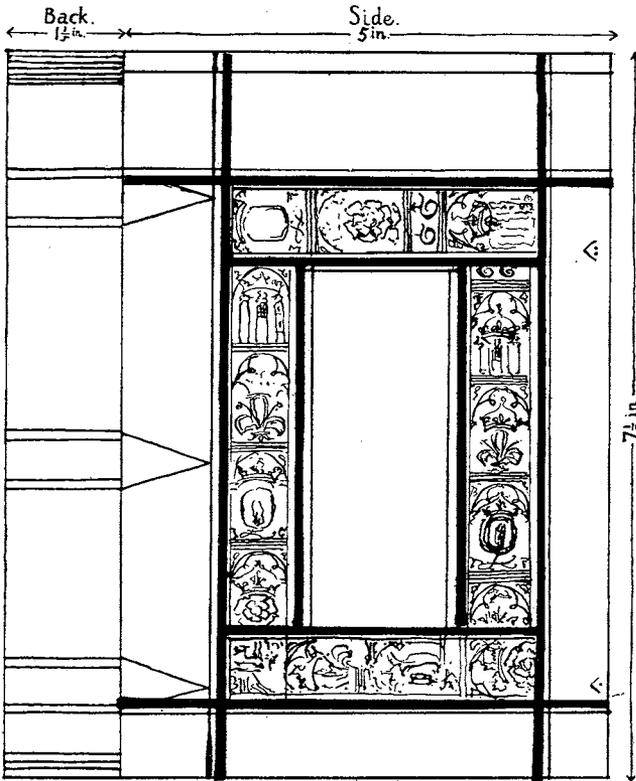
Some look as if the window had been destroyed by fire. A large number of bits of thin greenish window glass were iridescent and opaque owing to the destruction of the surface by ammonia and other alkalis. One larger piece of similar glass was preserved by having the centre of the spinning disk in it.

There is a globular green glass flask and some old fashioned wine bottles with the base projecting a little beyond the sides.

Some bits of coloured glass vessels occur scattered through the earth.



Fragment of Earthenware with Tobacco-pipe Stems imbedded.

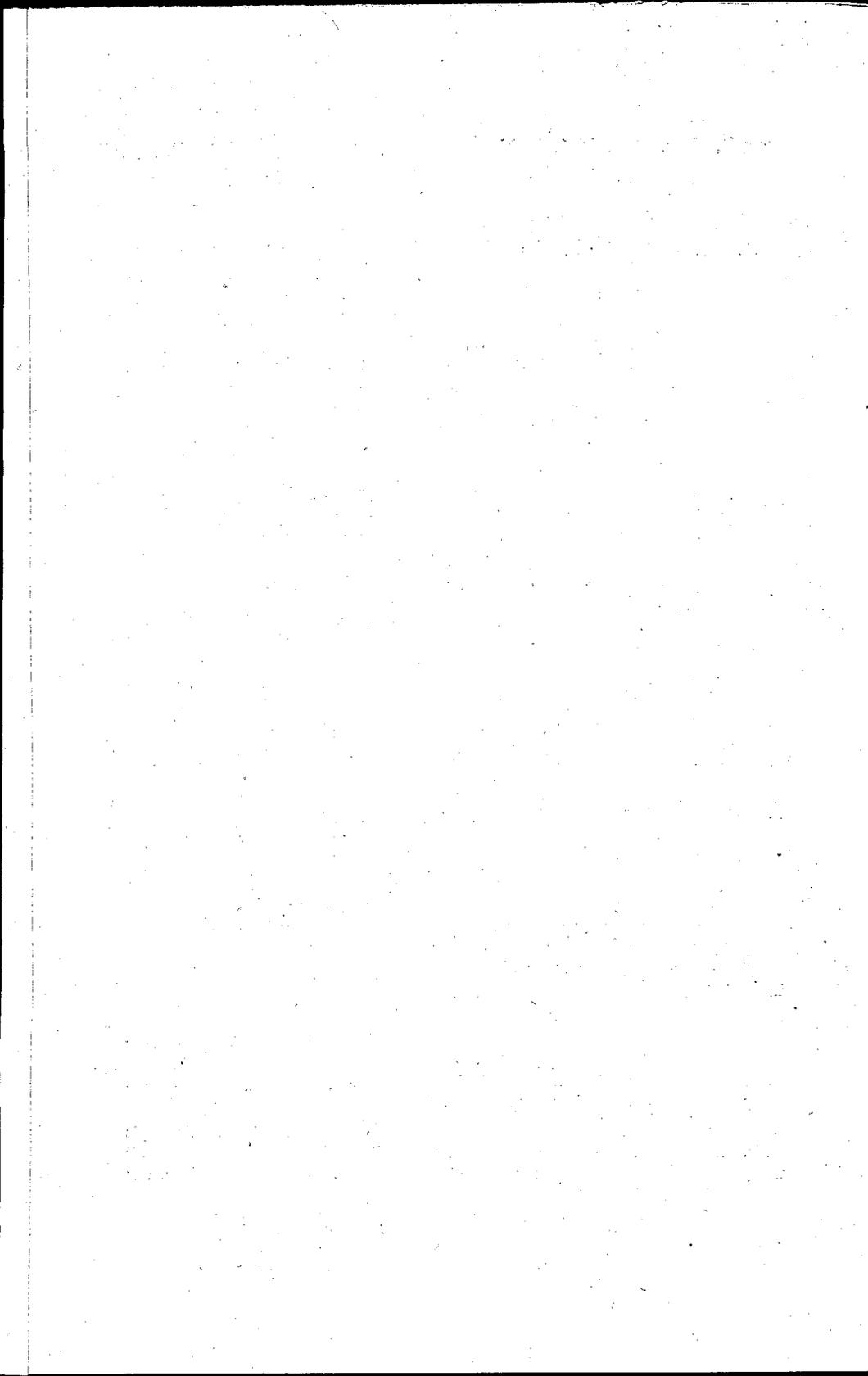


Half-size Diagram of Binding by Garrett Godfrey, and Roll (full size) decorating the same, the latter reproduced by kind permission of the author from Mr G. J. Gray's "The Earlier Cambridge Stationers," Pl. xxvi. No. III.

The roll is thus described by Mr Gray, p. 37 :

"Roll III, of four compartments: a turreted gateway, a fleur-de-lys, a pomegranate, a Tudor rose, each surmounted by a royal crown, in canopied compartments, while the binder's initials G. G. are in a small panel between the rose and the turreted gateway." The gateway is the castle of Castile, the pomegranate the personal badge of Catharine of Aragon.

The disposition of the ornament is not quite like any other example of Godfrey's work. The other fragmentary binding was very similar, but the outer frame was, as it were, mitred instead of the fillets running straight through. The leather of both was originally black. E. H. M.



Of leather objects there is a large quantity, chiefly boots and shoes in which the threads have entirely perished, so that the pieces of leather have fallen apart and show the holes made by the stitches.

There is a considerable difference in form and size, some being small and pointed, others broad and rounded. I have on a former occasion gone very fully into this question<sup>1</sup>, so I will not dwell upon it any longer now, except to notice a curious form in which a sole having much the form of a flat-iron but with the margin turned up all round suggests that the sole was thickened by the inclusion of something between two pieces of leather, perhaps wood, forming a leather-covered clog. One example of a short leather gaiter was found.

But perhaps the most interesting things found in this part of the ditch were two book covers (Plate II, reproduced from a drawing by our President), one nearly perfect, the other only a small fragment. In the case of the shoes everything but the leather has perished, and therefore we could not expect the paper and stitching to have survived in the book if it had been thrown in whole, but there is reason for suspecting that these leather covers were torn off and used for some other purpose because, as pointed out by Mr Murray of the Trinity Library, the margin of even the larger specimen has been cut off as if to make it fit a different object, so that some of the edge which would have been turned over within the cover is gone. The tooling on the leather has been identified by the Librarian and Mr Sayle, as well as by Mr Murray, and the trade mark (two G's and an arrow) of Garrett Godfrey has been recognized in the rolls. The date must therefore be somewhere between 1503 and 1539, and is probably about 1525 to 1530. Of course they may have been thrown in at any subsequent period, but they were found in the lowest black clay in which the oldest of the other objects occurred.

I shall place them in the University Library.

Among the metal objects are two white metal spoons of which the handles are in both cases broken off. Mr Redfern refers these to the seventeenth century.

<sup>1</sup> *Proc. Camb. Ant. Soc.*, Vol. VIII, Oct. 23, 1893, p. 275.

There are a few instruments, such as pot-hooks and hangers and various fragments of iron; a carving knife, and a smaller one with a wooden handle, also a very small one with a notched back, and a small clasp knife; a crushed metal handle, perhaps of a large fork, and one blade of a pair of shears. It is not at all uncommon to find shears in ancient household rubbish in Cambridge, but it is not likely that they indicate sheep shearing as an ordinary agricultural operation. They are often—I may say generally—of smaller size than those used for sheep shearing, and were probably used in some kitchen operation, perhaps the preparation of the sheep's head referred to above, p. 22, by clipping the more prominent wool before singeing. There is one old key; a bronze brooch-like ornament and a bone lace-bobbin.

There is a brass plate with repoussé star-shaped ornament. The most curious point about it is its gold colour which made me take it to the Chemical Laboratory where I was assured that it was only a copper alloy.

Other odds and ends of some interest are the small broken hone, apparently as much used for pointing skewers and forks as for sharpening knives; a brick  $1\frac{3}{4}$  inches thick; fragments of tiles perforated for attachment, and of a sandstone flag. Some flints showing little trace of surface weathering and a glacially striated block of hard chalk, suggest transport from a considerable distance.

The point of an oak pile carries us back to the time when the ditch was being encroached upon, or perhaps to the still earlier period when a footbridge was thrown across the water-course which became the ditch. The outside rough plank first sawn off the tree trunk may belong to the same time. A piece of a handmill of Niedermendig lava suggests much but tells little, and the piece of chalk with a hole in it much like that produced by a gate-post, still sometimes seen, swinging on a supporting stone.

Now to make a guess at the age of the deposit. The buildings extending over the edge of the ditch do not appear to be more than a century or a century and a half old, while the ditch itself, if it is part of the boundary made by the Town

Bailiffs in the time of King John, gives the twelfth century as a back limit.

The red earthenware glazed pans have been in use for a long time. Let us refer those in the ditch to the eighteenth century.

The tobacco pipes, the painted stone ware, the Cologne ware, and the thin bricks may belong to the second half of the seventeenth century.

The book covers are early sixteenth century.

The glass may belong to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and the shoes to about the same time.

The slip ware, tigs and drinking cups to the fifteenth century, and the oldest of the knives to the same.

But there is none of the ware and other objects which I found in Petty Cury and thereabouts, and which I referred to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

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VOL. XIX.



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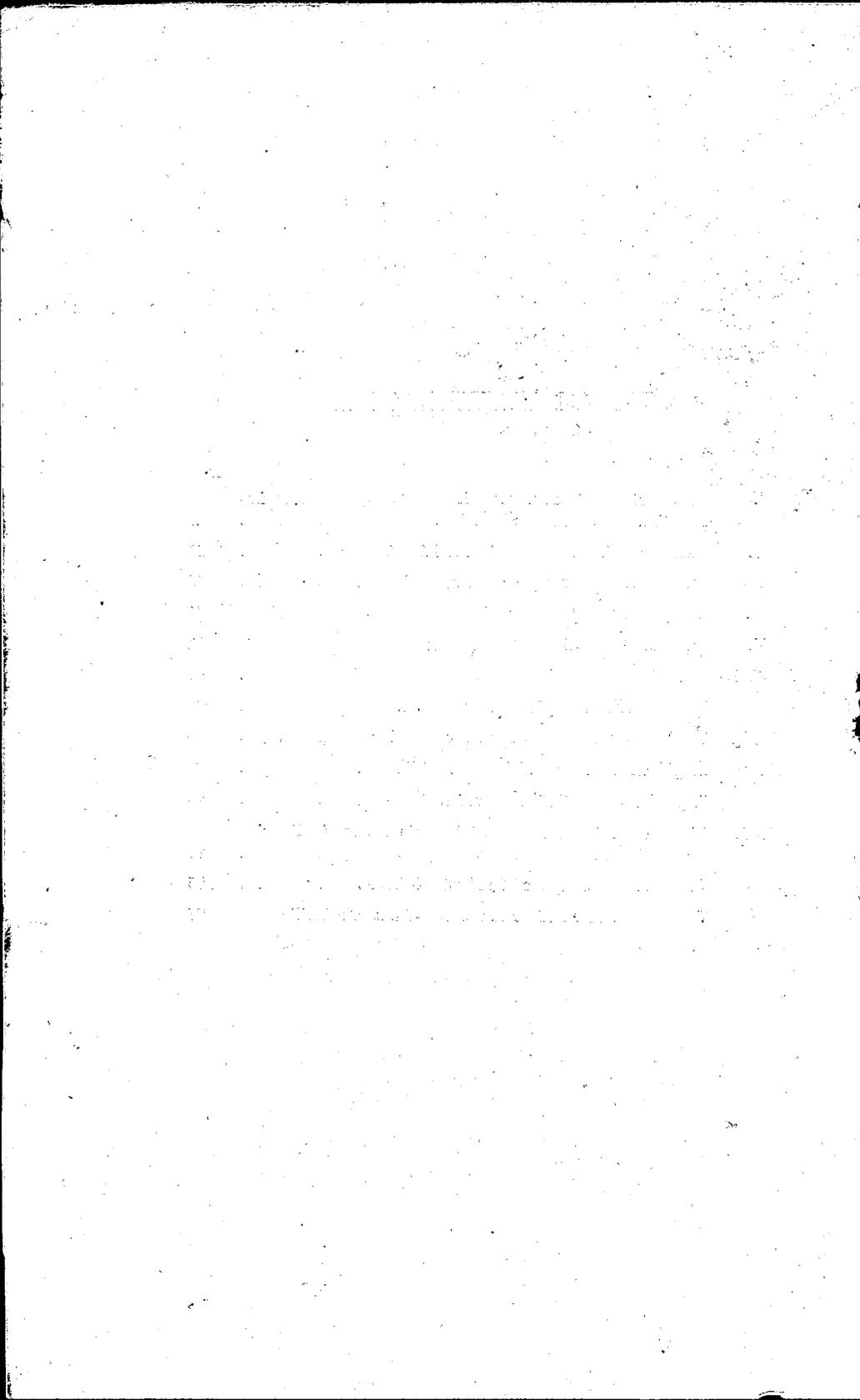
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