



Notes on Pre-Historic and Roman Dorchester.

By William Cozens.

THROUGHOUT the Thames valley there are evidences of the existence of man during what is called the Old Stone Age ; such occur at Dorchester in Oxfordshire, where remains of animals bearing the marks of flint implements are occasionally found in the river gravel.

About thirty years ago when repairs were in progress at Dorchester bridge, the water being very low, the workmen discovered among other remains in the gravel the brow antler of a red deer, and the horn of another which had been neatly sawn in two. A few years later, when gravel was being dredged south of the rod eyot at Day's Lock, more remains were found. In the year 1864, at the end of the cut on the Oxfordshire side opposite this spot, human bones could be plainly seen in the bank about six feet below the surface of the ground and just above the water, but have long since disappeared having been swept away by floods. Higher up the river, thirty yards above the rush bed called Swan's Nest, in 1869 the stumps of old piles remained in the river bed near the left bank.

Formerly a ring about fifty yards in diameter could be distinguished in the corn growing in Dorchester Farm field a short distance north of the buildings, which probably indicated the site of an early Celtic settlement ; that this neighbourhood was thickly populated is evident from the fact that fragmentary remains are so often met with beneath the surface. About the year 1857, three skeletons were unearthed in the field close to the garden wall at Bishop's Court ; a few years later on digging a drain in the yard two more were discovered. Previous to the Roman occupation of Dorchester, and during its continuance, the inhabited area was much more extensive than at the present time. Before the recreation ground was laid out rectangular lines were clearly traceable in the Manor Farm field indicating the position of ancient buildings similar to those in the North Field, Long Wittenham, Berks, which

led to the discovery by Mr. J. H. Hewett, during the dry summer of 1893, of the site of a British village.

There was a considerable settlement also on the left bank of the Thames ; in the field called Mead-side Piece, about the year 1874, a great quantity of broken Roman pottery was ploughed up ; and in 1882, labourers making a drain disinterred several skeletons ; in a gravel pit beyond this field some antique spoons were found a few years before. The Dykes which extend in an easterly direction from the Isis to the Thames possess great interest for antiquarians who, however, differ as to their origin, though they generally consider them to be pre-Roman.

Near the Thames these earthworks make a curve in the direction of the ancient ford at the junction of the rivers ; at this spot a Celtic buckler and a bronze dagger sheath were dredged up in the year 1837.

When making the new lock in August, 1871, the workmen found a bronze spearhead in the bank on the Oxfordshire side, and another by the weir on the Berkshire side ; one was secured for the museum, but the other was smuggled away.

Some years prior to 1864 a small Greek wine-cup or kylix, and part of a clay bottle were dug up at the north end of the Manor Farm rickyard ; these articles are considered to have been imported in pre-Roman times.

The number of coins found at Dorchester of the British princes bear witness to the prosperity of the city before its subjugation by Aulus Plautius ; unfortunately there is no complete record of them, but the following list may be of interest :—

Gold coin of Cunobeline found in Overy Field, 1824.
“Skelton.”

Gold plated coin of Cunobeline found in Overy Field,
1876.

Gold coin of Cunobeline found in Overy Field, 1885.

Bronze coin of Cunobeline.

Silver of Verulam (Mr. W. R. Davies).

Do. Veric. found in the Demesne, August, 1876.

Do. Tasciovanus Hemp Croft, 1897.

Bronze Tasciovanus found May, 1877, in sinking a well at the Mission College.

Bronze Tasciovanus found in the Hemp Croft, July, 1882.

Specimens of tin money have also occurred. “Six British coins were in a general collection which brought the owner £60.” Skel-

ton's Antiquities.

The following are the most interesting relics of the long occupation of the city by the Romans :—The altar dedicated to Jupiter by the beneficiary Marcus Varus Severus, discovered a few years prior to 1738 ; the large urn containing two glass vessels met with when building the new vicarage about the year 1856 ; a bronze figure forming part of a tripod to support a lamp, weight $8\frac{1}{4}$ oz. ; a bronze earring, weight 55 grains, found on the site of a malthouse by the western footpath opposite Chain Lane on July 7th, 1886, and by permission of the owner of the property were presented to the Ashmolean Museum.

On June 10th, 1869, a shepherd with his bar disturbed some bones on a piece of ground, that belonged to Mr. Thomas Wilkins, near the landing stage on the Isis opposite Bishop's Court ; permission having been obtained, an examination of the spot was made which led to the discovery of a deep pit eight feet long by four feet broad full of bones, horns and tusks of oxen, sheep and swine ; underneath was a thick layer of animal ashes ; and at the bottom a dozen great stones bearing the marks of fire. Out of thirty entire jaw bones of *Bos longifrons* one or two were selected, with some ashes, and the remainder returned to the pit and carefully buried ; there were no coins or other relics discovered, but a tessera was picked up afterwards in the same field.

During the restoration of the south-east chapel in the Abbey Church in the year 1874 some charred corn was found many feet beneath the surface. A great quantity of Roman pottery and numerous coins were also met with about this time in the garden of the residence called Town House below seven or eight feet of accumulated soil. Many well-preserved British and Roman vessels, coins and an entire skull of the small Celtic ox, *Bos longifrons* were in the possession of the late Mr. Wm. Cobb, builder, of Dorchester.

One of the fields mentioned by Leland, wherein were *Numismata Romanorum*, is doubtless the well-known Hemp Croft, which, enclosed by ditch and rampart, was the site of part of the town and camp. On the west side of the little path traversing the middle of the allotment gardens and about thirty yards from the south border a great many Roman bricks were dug up thirty-two years ago. Valuable coins are still occasionally met with here although so many thousands have been collected, indeed so common were they that a former landlord of the George Inn kept a quart cup full of coins in the window.

Roman coins before the reign of Claudius are extremely rare, otherwise with some exceptions the Imperial series is fairly represented as the following list will show :—

Silver : Nero, Otho (Farm field), Vespasian, Domitian, Trajan, Antoninus Pius (Manor Farm field), Julia Domna, Julia Mœsa, Plautilla, Geta, Elagabalus, Alexander Severus, Julian II.

Bronze and billon : Claudius, Nero, Vespasian, Domitian, Nerva, Trajan (Manor House garden), Hadrian, Antoninus Pius, Valerian, Gallienus, Claudius II., Aurelian, Postumus, Victorinus, Tetricus, Florianus (Davies), Probus (very fine, Manor Farm field), Carinus, Maximian, Carausius, Allectus, Helena, Licinius, Licinianus, Constantine I., Crispus, City of Rome, City of Constantinople, Constantine II., Constans, Magnentius, Decentius, Constantine II., Valentinianus, Valens, Gratian, Theodosius, Arcadius, Honorius.

A gold coin of the Emperor Maurice, circa. 582, "Skelton," and some very early specimens of Anglo-Saxon coinage have been found.

In the year 1736, a pure gold ring with a cornelian stone on which a mitre was engraved was dug up in a garden near the Abbey Church ; the date of the consecration of St. Birinus, it is thought, was added subsequently.

Traces of the buildings associated with the ecclesiastical history of Saxon Dorchester are yet visible in the Close at Bishop's Court ; these having been no longer required after the removal of the see to Lincoln in 1092, were, according to Antony A. Wood, demolished, and the stones used in the construction of the new Abbey, begun in 1140. The rectangular outline of the ancient fishpond under the trees on the north of these foundations was very apparent until six years ago, when it was thought advisable to have the hollow filled up.

Coins and other relics of the early Saxon period are very rare, but in 1874 the bronze buckle of a sword belt, a spindle whorl and other objects were found in a mound at the south-eastern end of the Dykes. The head of a rude halberd or bill was dredged out of the Lock-pool about 1860 ; and twenty years later a pilgrim's bottle and a singular iron object, partly plated with gold, resembling a fetterlock were dug out of a sand bank in the river Thames half way between Queenford and Overy.

The more recent discoveries were noticed during a residence in the village of nearly thirty years, but the better known antiquities are fully described in the works of the Rev. Henry Addington, and Skelton, from which extracts have been made in order that the record might be more complete, though necessarily very imperfect.