



Notes and Queries

RELATING TO BERKS, BUCKS AND OXON.

Communications are invited upon all subjects of Antiquarian or Architectural interest relating to the three counties. Correspondents are requested to write as plainly as possible, on one side of the paper only, with REPLIES, QUERIES and NOTES on SEPARATE SHEETS, and the name of the writer appended to each communication.

Notes.

NOTES ON THE ROMAN OCCUPATION OF LITTLE WITTENHAM, BERKS.—

The site of the village of Little Wittenham, Berkshire was doubtless occupied by the Romans at the same period as Dorchester on the other side of the river. It is owing to the necessity of gaining possession of such a dominating position as the British camp on the hill; this is generally considered to have occurred in the campaign of Aulus Plautius during the reign of Claudius, A.D. 54. There is evidence in support of this conjecture by the fact that the large bronze coins of the succeeding Emperors, struck by order of the Senate, have been sometimes met with. Beyond the park to the north of the old Manor House, the residence of Sir Henry Oxenden in 1787, but shortly afterwards demolished, there stood early in the 19th Century a group of cottages called Little Town; at this spot a fine denarius of Trajan was found. There are also many indications of a settlement on the western slope of the Wittenham hills; near the buildings belonging to the Hill Farm on a piece of ground, about three acres in extent, which is called Stone Hill or Old Oxford, large stones that had evidently been used for building have been frequently turned up by the plough, and Roman coins are occasionally picked up at the same place, and also in the neighbourhood. The most notable are a fine second brass of Domitian, other coins of Trajan, and a fine half argenteus of Gratian, also a fine third brass of Arcadius and many more. On another part of the same field called Moor Furlong, in May, 1887, a small bronze key was found, only weighing 47 grains troy; this was pronounced to be Roman by the Keeper of the Ashmolean Museum to whom it was presented. It may be taken for granted that the British camp on what is now known as Castle Hill commanding both the ford below, and the ancient town beyond, would have been permanently garrisoned by such masters of the art of war as the Romans; it is significant that the land opposite the principal entrance to the hill fortress still bears the name of Port Furlong. As an instance of the general distribution of the later Roman coins it may be mentioned that one of the usurper Magnentius A.D., 350, having the Christian monogram covering the entire field of the reverse, was found a few years ago at the secluded hamlet of Mackney in the parish of Brightwell, Berks.—WILLIAM COZENS, Benson.

MEMORIALS OF OLD BUCKINGHAMSHIRE (Bemrose & Son, 23, Old Bailey, London, E.C., price 10s. 6d.) is a new work which will shortly be published if a sufficient number of subscribers is forthcoming. It is written by various authors, amongst whom may be mentioned Mrs. Climençon, Rev. J. E. Field, Rev. A. J. Foster, Mr. H. Harcourt-Smith, Lady Verney, the Editor of this Journal, and several other writers. A prospectus will be issued shortly, and we shall be glad to receive as soon as possible the names of any of our readers who may wish to subscribe.

READING ANTIQUITIES.—May I suggest to our local Society the desirability of visiting and inspecting the following:—

1st. The ancient barn now at Battle Farm, Oxford Road, Reading, which was, I believe, originally erected at the top of Caversham Road on the spot known now as Friar's Place, but in old times as "Town End." It was built by Lawrence Burgess in 1204, and was named St. Edmond's Chapel. In 1479 it was desecrated. In 1546 it was represented in a Survey as "a barn very necessary for the King's Farm of Battle." It was removed to Battle Farm about 1760. I may mention that the land adjoining Battle Farm is being rapidly built upon.

2nd. The old masonry in the garden at the back of No. 21, Coley Hill, marked on Coates' Map "Ancient Fortifications." This masonry is now within the outbuildings erected a year or two since, but previously could be seen from Weston Street. Is this the site of the "Invincible Fort" called "Harrison's Barn"? Coates was of this opinion, but he only mentions "earthworks" not masonry (Hist. Reading, p. 41).

3rd. The reputed Norman Doorway and contiguous masonry in the yard of the Sun Inn, Castle Street. Can anyone state what ancient building these ruins are the remains of? If really Norman, then the theory of the existence of a Friary on the site is improbable, and the conjecture that King Stephen's Castle stood here is a more likely one, although the situation is so much lower than the western end of the street, which is often considered to be the site of the Castle.

4th. ORACLE (THE).—A solution of the origin of this word can be found in the following:—The building was Kendrick's Workhouse or "Work Hall," and Oracle spoken broadly would have a similar pronunciation. "Oracle" is therefore a corruption of "Work Hall."—WILLIAM T. BILSON, Castle Hill, Reading, December 27th, 1900.

Query.

BARTON HOUSE.—I shall be grateful for any information as to the siege and destruction of Barton House or Court, near Abingdon, which took place during the Civil War, some time after March, 1646, when royal troops were concealed there before Rupert's unsuccessful attempt to recapture Abingdon. Cannon balls were found in the ruins, and the siege is referred to by late writers, but no contemporary account can be found. It is believed that the defence was conducted by Sir Compton Reade. This Barton House must not be confused with Barton House in Derbyshire, which was also garrisoned by the Royalists during the Civil War. A query to the above effect has already appeared in the Journal for July, 1896, but no information was elicited.—H. V. READE.