



An Important Village in Adventurous Times.

By I. Giberne Sieveking.

NOT many people who pass through Brill, and admire its quaint picturesqueness, its cobbled streets, its magnificent view, its unspoilt old-worldliness, are aware that here, in other days, was a place of no mean importance. The hunting lodge of Edward the Confessor, the Court of two medieval Kings, was pitched here. Earlier still, it was a demesne of Saxon Kings. Here too, occurred much later, the famous Royalist victory, in which John Hampden and the Parliamentary Troops were driven off in 1642. Indeed Brill played a spirited part throughout almost the whole of the Civil Wars. Old records mention that the "garrison did good service, not only in defending Oxford," (distant only twelve miles from Brill) "from mischievous incursions, but did very near support itself by the contributions it drew from Bucks, besides the prey it frequently took from the very neighbourhood of Aylesbury." (Clarendon). Tradition says that in 1645 Fairfax was forced to retreat, when he made an attempt to take "the poor-house" (the Gatehouse) "with loss, and very little to his honour."

During a day spent in Brill last week I saw no signs of the old Gatehouse, nevertheless some accounts of fifty years back say that it "is still standing, though it wears a dismal aspect of desolation and decay."

But that was not the only relic of former times that I found, on enquiry, had so to speak, worn out and disappeared. By far the most regrettable tokens of the ancient history of Brill that have now completely vanished, are the old hospitals of St. John and St. Leonard, (for support of infirm lepers, and other poor persons) which dated from the reign of Henry I.; the monastery of the White Friars; (Richard II.) the hermitage of St. Werburgh, and Chetwode Priory, in Bernwode Forest. Of all of these, no definite trace remains. Ancient dames stooping with years; keenly interested younger citizens, had "heard tell" nothing whatever about

Hospital or Priory. One citizen, however, after pondering a little, took me to the highest ground beyond the Village, where he said he could show me the site, in a cottage garden, of the "Ancient Pest-house," where he thought lepers and small pox patients had been in former days tended. It lay on a little declivity, at the turn of the road, and was surrounded by old gabled cottages.

Here then, may have been one of the old hospitals of St. John or St. Leonard, but it is *only* a "may have been," for there was absolutely no trace now of a building, only the indication of its former foundations. Close to it stands an old mill, "which I've overhauled and done up meself," said my informant, so he knew it was "two or three hundred year old."

Pointing to another windmill several yards further away, he averred that it was "certainly five hundred year old." This apparently admitted of no doubt, for he, himself was "a native of the place, and had lived 'ere all his life!"

Country statements are sometimes difficult to swallow, but they must certainly be received, with a decent show of credulity at the hands of those who administer them,—one can so easily add a grain or two of mental salt later—lest the weaker brother should take offence. Was it not in early days that fabulous stories found congenial soil in which to grow to marvellous estate?

For here in the time of the Confessor "Wulwyn cutting down fuel in the Wood of Bruelle, fell asleep, and from a settlement of blood in his eyes, he lost his sight for seventeen years; and after a dream, he made a pilgrimage to eighty-seven churches and at length was recovered by royal touch."

It was supposed to be in the South East part of the village that the Grey Friars' Monastery had its lands and buildings. But though no outward or visible sign remains, yet we have still the record of their views in respect of property.

"Forasmooche as wee the Warden and officers of the House of Saynte Francis of Ailesburie, comonly call'd the Grey Friars in Aylesburie, do profoundly consider that the perfection of Christian livinge dothe notte consist in cerimonies, waringe of a gree coote, disgesinge ourself after straunge fassions, dokyng and beckyng, in gurdyng ourselves with a gurdle, full of knotts, and other like papistical cerimonies, wherein wee have ben moost principally practised and misled in times paste," the result of this being that they decided to give up all their lands, etc.

In the centre of the village is a sort of triangular space, now poorly grassed over, doubtless in old times, the local habitation of the village stocks: the place of punishment for miscreant inhabitants whereon they perhaps lifted up their voice and wept. Now, the only screams to be heard are those of the swirling swift, wheeling and dipping continually over the little square, and the tramp's little tired child, following her mother, fist in eye, and her one sustained note, a pitiful wail.

Many of the cottages have gables in the deep roofs, and many are timbered, with latticed windows and with projecting upper stories.

The church has a curious bunched-up appearance, its head, or tower, sunk deep in its shoulders, the nave. The tower is certainly the oldest part of the building, believed to date from 1300. There is a curious, insignificant steeple, which only rises just above the parapet of the tower.

According to Leland, "the Church is one of the most quaintest in all these quarters." Inside it is beautifully kept, but beyond a piscina curiously placed, some rather remarkable rafters over the Chancel, and an opening in the wall above the arch to the belfry, there was nothing of special antiquarian interest.

In the churchyard is a splendid avenue of old yews leading to the west end of the Church. Behind it, on the north-west side, is a sort of raised ground, or embankment, which went by the name of "King's Field." Possibly here, the battle was fought in 1642.

As regards the origin of the name "Brill," Lipscombe says it was anciently "Brehull," and supposed to have been derived from Burgh Heath. Hearne considered that the coins found here "proved it to be an ancient borough"; and, of course, the Brill pottery making dated from as far back as Roman times.

Kennet thought "Brereham or Brehull" was derived from a word signifying a brake or thicket.

There were, according to old records, "twenty-five ploughs, nineteen villeins, thirteen bordars, and seventeen ploughs. The Conqueror retained Brill as part of his royal demesnes."

Nothing could have given the old village a more beautiful environment than did the summer day on which I first saw it. Everything was clothed with light as with a garment. All seemed enveloped in a wonderful glisten of white haze—a dazzle, and a glitter. The softest suggestion of a breeze waved tenderly the delicate silvery fingers of the willows with a tremulous musical patter. Away

to my right was a field of vivid saffron, lit with the scarlet gleam of poppies. Nearer at hand, meadows, not yet mown, rich with flowers of all tints and colours, lit every now and then by the passing flash of some gorgeous tint in butterfly or dragonfly. Nearer still, fields of hay, and reedy water-lilled pools, deep rich brown in the sun.

Among such surroundings it is not difficult to conjure up before one's mind's eye, Brill as she used to be, Brill in her medieval glory, honour and importance. And now, again, it is infinitely restful and exhilarating to go apart for a little to the quiet suggestiveness of old sites where have happened the great things of other days, even though the very buildings perhaps are vanished, and the former voices in the streets can only speak from between the pages of old records.

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.

ERRATUM.—ROBERT ALDWORTH.—Page 61, Vol. 10, for Trilford read Frilford.

MAGDALEN COLLEGE, OXFORD.—The Muniments of this College, so ably edited by Dr. Macray, comprising nearly 14,000 documents, contain copious materials for local history and the descent of many families. Amongst the wills found amongst these papers are those of:—

Richard Campion, Appleton, 1652.

Richard Fode, Shalbourne, 1411.

Revd. Thomas Lamprey, Canterbury, Appleton, 1759.

Sir John Leynham, Knt., 1479, Tubney.

There are two letters from John Foster, Vicar of Speen, lists of the Halls and Inns of Oxford, Academic tradesmen, and pre-reformation parochial clergy. Amongst the Berkshire Vicars we notice:—

Sir Roger Whytard of Southam, vicar of Appleton 1326.

Adam de Clivesond, rector of Ashbury 1230—40.

Richard Nykke, LL.D., rector of Ashbury 1493.

Sir Thomas Snowsel, prest of Asshebere before 1500.