



## The Victoria History of Berks.

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**M**R. H. PEAKE has specially honoured the article on "Early Man" with some praise accompanied by a long enumeration of "omissions" and "inaccuracies" which seems at first sight rather formidable; but, while thanking Mr. Peake for his suggestions, I may remark generally that it is one of the first requisites in an historian to be able to distinguish between the essential and the non-essential and between good evidence and bad. We are in fact hardened criminals: we do not repent; and I propose to give some reasons for what we have done.

Mr. Peake asks why we have not referred to "some urns dug up in the park" at Yattendon. The answer is because we would like to have some more complete information.

We are said not to have referred to "the urn found in Shaw churchyard in 1879." The information is from the "Newbury Weekly News," of 18th July, 1878, which says that the urn was destroyed. We fully considered this case; but, as it was admitted that Romano-British ware was found in the churchyard, we did not consider the evidence as to the precise age of the urn conclusive.

Another omission is that of an urn found on Speen moor "a century ago." An urn described as *Roman* was referred to in the *Phil. Tr.* of 1757, rather more than a century ago. Mr. Peake thinks this "*might have been British.*" On the other hand it might not; and the Royal Society is at least as good an authority as the "Newbury Weekly News." As the urn cannot be produced, it is idle to discuss the matter in this section.

We have also omitted to notice some spear-heads "found at Grimsbury," and are referred to a "*History of Newbury and its Environs* (1839)," an anonymous compilation. According to the *Jour. Br. Arch. Ass.* (vol. 16, pp. 229, 230), "a *Roman* spear was found, and several spear heads *supposed to be Roman* are said to have been discovered in the gravel round the entrenchment." This may be evidence of the Bronze Age for Mr. Peake: it is not for us.

Again. We have not mentioned "two early skulls found in Benham marsh." In our article we state that "the presence of

Neolithic man appears to be indicated by the finding of a human skull in the peat near Newbury *associated with stone implements*" (*Q. Jour. Geol. Soc.*, II., 128). That skull was found in 1825. It was the earliest and strongest evidence we could find. We were quite aware of the imperfect skull from Benham, which came into the hands of Prof. Rolleston. But where is the *second* skull from Benham? The *History of Newbury* may perhaps help us. It says: "The upper part or *scalp* (!) of a human skull has been dug from the same ground at Speen, whence the spear-heads were taken"—which is held "to confirm the Mosaic account of divine punishment on the human race."

Further. We have not referred to the "*skulls found near the Halfway in the parish of Welford.*" Dr. S. Palmer (*Tr. Newbury Dis. F. Club*, II., 124), speaks of *one skull*, but it was broken, and there was no evidence of its age.

Perhaps it would add to our culpability if I were to mention that we have in our possession at Reading *plenty of early skulls* in good condition. Why then do we not mention them? Because implements are far better evidence of age than skulls.

I now turn to a fault of another kind. We have mentioned *three* bronze spear-heads as having been found at Speen. Mr. Peake suggests that there were only *two*. We followed Sir John Evans (*Ancient Bronze Implements*, pp. 330, 333, 337), who gives as his authority *Jour. B. Arch. Ass.* (vol. 16, pp. 250, 322), which seems to justify his statements. Indeed, Sir John Evans describes the implements as belonging to different types and as being of different sizes. His authority *might* be wrong. If so, why did not Mr. Peake communicate with Sir John Evans long ago? But is the point worth contesting? Nothing hinges upon it.

Mr. Peake regrets that we have not alluded to a supposed cromlech or "an avenue to a Druidical temple," *said to have once existed* at Hill Green, Leckhampstead. We do not share his regret. He thinks also we should in any case have catalogued "all solitary stones with names attached to them"! This is indeed bewildering. He mentions three "hangman-stones," the very name of which indicates a modern use; the stone which "Wayland Smith threw at his boy," which does not illustrate the sports of Early Man, and is probably a recent joke; "the imp-stone, which is supposed to be a Roman milestone"; and the "blowing-stone," which is nothing but a perforated Sarsen-stone. He might have mentioned the "solar altar stone" at Letcombe Castle. If we were compiling a village

guide, doubtless these things would not have been overlooked ; and perhaps a place may be found for them somewhere—not, however, in the article on “Early Man.”

In our brief notice of Ancient Roads we confined ourselves to very strict limits. Mr. Peake says we have confused the Icknield way and the Ridgeway “in spite of the evidence of their distinctness obtained from Saxon Charters.” We have spoken of “the ancient road *known as* the Icknield or Ickleton Street and also as the Ridgeway.” I need only quote Col. Cooper King’s *History of Berkshire* and the Ordnance map to show that the ancient road along the Chalk escarpment is *known* by both those names. The usage may be wrong ; but there it is. Nor is it easy to see what Saxon Charters have to do with the matter. With regard to the present condition of the road, I am afraid it can be nowhere said to be very “typical” after having been in use for three thousand years.

A word must be said about our short chapter on the “Coins of the Ancient Britons.” We might have been even more brief in our reference to the *inscribed* Coins, since they indicate contact with the Romans, and are not in a strict sense pre-historic ; and we did not profess to give a catalogue of all the British coins found, or *said* to have been found, in Berkshire. It is, therefore, an agreeable surprise to find that there are only *two* identified coins which we have not mentioned. One is a coin of Cunobelin, which was found “in Cæsar’s Camp at Easthampstead.” Perhaps this is the same as the one said by Col. Cooper King to have been found at the Romano-British settlement at Wickham Bushes. Anyhow, we have referred to two other coins of Cunobelin. The other instance is a coin of Verica recently found near Challow. We are obliged to Mr. Peake for the information, of which we shall make a note. But we certainly never hoped to be able to mention all the coins that have been found, still less to refer to those which are merely “*said* to have been found,” as in the case referred to in an editorial footnote in *Tr. Newb. Dis. F. Club* (II. 93).

Mr. Peake warmly praises our index-map to the various localities at which pre-historic remains have been found ; and we think it is a valuable feature of the History. Still, as nothing on earth is perfect, can it hope to escape, when there have been so many “omissions” in the text ? The map is on a very small scale, and the sign for interments does not pretend to shew the *exact* number or position of these. Full details in the case of tumuli will be found in a separate article on “Ancient Earthworks.”

In one locality Mr. Peake complains that we have put five dots—the sign for interments. Two of these are for Stanmore and Rowbury. Another is for a “sepulchral mound” at Hill Green (*Newbury Dis. F. Club*, Tr., II. 63), where the “Druids’ temple” is said to have been. The other two are probably an attempt to visualize the statement of Dr. Palmer as to the great number of interments in that district (p. 16). And many graves of Early Man are not marked by any tumulus. The present writer recently found one such in a gravel-pit, and has described numerous interments at Sulham, found, in digging gravel, since the article was published.

Mr. Peake seems to object to Rowbury barrow being regarded as an interment, since *only* charcoal-ashes were found in it. Well, I suppose in pre-historic times they did not make tumuli and put ashes in them merely for fun. I should regard it as good evidence of an interment. And I may remark that Canon Greenwell regards all barrows as presumptive evidence of interment, even if no ashes or relics of man have been found. He gives reasons (*British Barrows*, p. 28); but the subject need not be discussed here.

Nor is this the end of our iniquities. In the Topographical list “Churn is given as a separate heading, though this in the parish of Blewbury.” Also, we are told, Hagbourne Hill is *not* in Chilton parish. As a matter of fact, we have not stated that it is. This is parochial criticism indeed. I could add that Twyford is, I believe, in the parish of Ruscombe.

With regard to our treatment of Palæolithic and Neolithic times, we have earned Mr. Peake’s approval. With one exception (the justice of which we do not admit), “nothing appears to have been omitted.” Unfortunately, or perhaps fortunately for our readers, it is here especially that, owing to the enormous amount of material at our disposal and the necessary limits and plan of the work, we have been obliged to subordinate detail to a general plan. We have, for instance, not even discussed the rudely-worked stones known as eoliths, about which there is so extensive a literature; and we could have said much, if space had been available, on the burial-customs of Early Man.

We are far from thinking that our work is perfect. Indeed, we could criticize it far more severely than Mr. Peake has done. We think now, after the ordeal which it has undergone, that it may possibly have some merit, although we lay claim to none except that of painstaking and the careful scrutiny of evidence.

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