


DERBYSHIRE ARCHÆOLOGICAL
AND
NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY.

Notes on an Ancient Pack-horse Bridge
at Coxbench.

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T has seemed to me to be worth making some record in the pages of our *Journal* of a little bridge of a very primitive type which has lately been destroyed. This bridge, about midway between Little Eaton and Coxbench, carried an ancient bridle or pack-horse road over that turbulent and oddly-named little river, the Bottle Brook. The brook rises and falls with tremendous rapidity after heavy rains, and has before now succeeded in stopping the traffic on the railway which has invaded its valley. In some of its more recent floods it somewhat damaged the abutments of the bridge and made it a little dangerous, and the local authorities in consequence ordered its destruction. It has been replaced with an erection of tarred wood, and one cannot help a feeling of thankfulness that it was not done with blue bricks and steel joists; but all those who knew the picturesque quaintness of the old structure will feel a pang of regret at its disappearance. I myself see



Photo, by T. Garratt, Little Eaton.

TOAD LANE BRIDGE.

in it a warning of the necessity of unceasing vigilance on the part of all archæologists, for though it is only a mile from my own home, I had no notion that its destruction was even contemplated until I saw the new bridge. I never carefully examined it, but cannot help thinking that its destruction was absolutely unnecessary, and that if a small sum had been spent on repairing the abutments, it would, at much less expense, have long outlived the time for which its successor is likely to serve. The traffic over it is now almost confined to strollers on Saturday and Sunday afternoons.

The bridge was carried by a stone pier in the middle of the brook, and consisted of, if my memory is correct, six immense slabs of gritstone, stretching from the abutments on each bank to this central pillar. I do not imagine that the actual stones were of very great age, for, though polished smooth with the passage of many feet, they were not worn hollow, as gritstone, however hard, would be if they had lain there when the road was much used for horse traffic; but it was of a very primitive type, not often seen now.

The road which passed over it is of interest, and probably of very remote antiquity, as it forms parish boundaries for a great part of its course. Starting from Duffield Bridge, on which many roads and footpaths converge, it climbs, after the manner of ancient roads, by the most direct and steepest route, appropriately known as "Hobbly Hill," to the top of the ridge on the east side of the Derwent, and, keeping to a very straight line, drops down into the valley of the Bottle Brook. There is a curious break in its continuity where it crosses the modern Alfreton turnpike road which is difficult to explain. After crossing the brook, it again mounts to Morley Moor, in part as a footpath only, but after crossing the Roman Ryknield Street it again becomes a bridle road, and as such runs in a fairly direct course through Morley and Stanley to Dale Abbey. Mr. John Ward, in *Dale and Its Abbey*,

speaks of travellers between Derby and Nottingham going through Stanley Park, and this road would give an almost straight connection between Duffield Bridge and Nottinghamshire by the same route.

On Morley Moor the road takes a sharp bend round the well-known moated mound. Whether the bend in the road fixed the site of the mound, or whether the mound fixed the line of the road, is hard to say, but there is an obvious connection between the two which is proof of great antiquity.

Will not some one of our members who has the necessary leisure take up the study of the ancient roads and the development of the means of locomotion in our county? The subject would form deeply interesting matter for the pages of our *Journal*. There is a world of history on the square inch of the Ordnance Survey surrounding this little bridge to be made out by those who care to read it. It is interesting to speculate whether this road was in use before the Roman armies crossed the moor above; or to picture the mediæval packmen travelling from village to village when the road divided the Royal Forest of Duffield from the Dean of Lincoln's Park at Little Eaton; when the Castle of Horestan, from its abrupt ridge, frowned over the valleys of the Bottle Brook and its nameless tributary from Horsley Park. It is almost equally interesting to come to quite modern times, and to find at the east side of the bridge a pioneer of our railway system, an old tram road, laid down about 1794, with rails of angle iron spiked down to blocks of stone, which used to bring large quantities of coal, stone, and pottery down to the canal head at Little Eaton; while on its west side the Derby and Alfreton Turnpike Road, made under an Act of Parliament of 1784, tells of the days of stage coaches. Between the two runs the Ripley branch of the Midland Railway, which only within the last three years finally caused the abandonment of the old tram route, or gang line, as it was locally called, and which is itself now losing

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some of its traffic to the latest mode of locomotion, the motor omnibus.

We are indebted for the view of the bridge to Mr. T. Garratt, of Little Eaton, who had fortunately photographed it shortly before its destruction.