

An Extract from Memoranda respecting the Discovery of an ancient Stone Coffin, in the Church-yard of Chatton, Northumberland, by the Rev. JOSEPH COOK, of Newton Hall, Vicar of Chatton, &c.

ON the sixth of March, 1814, as the sexton of Chatton was digging a grave on the north side of the church of that place, he met with a stone about ten inches below the surface of the church-yard, and in breaking it to proceed with his work, a human skull shewed itself, lying in water, and surrounded with stone work. The cover was composed of three stones of nearly equal size, joined together with short iron cramps, embedded with lime and lead, and neatly bevelled off at the sides and ends. The shell, or excavated part of the coffin, was nearly full of water. The skull was not lying in the nich or curvature made for it; but in the place of the chest: it was nearly perfect, only the under jaw being wanting. The teeth of the upper jaw were a full set, and quite perfect. The thigh bones measured eighteen inches. All the mud was carefully filtered off from the contents of the coffin, but no relic of metal, or of any other description, was found.

At first I conjectured that this coffin, on account of its lying so near the surface, had been removed out of the church or chancel, when they were rebuilt in 1764: and the recollection that nearly two-thirds of the chancel had been excavated, under my own inspection, to the depth of nine feet, in 1804, for a vault for the family of John Wilkie, Esq. of Hetton, in this parish, without the least trace of any kind of sepulture appearing, would have assisted in confirming me in that idea, had I not satisfied myself by enquiring of people, who remembered the rebuilding of the church, that though several coffins were at that time removed out of the chancel, nobody recollected having either seen or heard of this of stone.

Some time after this discovery, I gave directions that the coffin should be raised from its bed, and placed in safety in the church; when the persons employed in the operation found, at its eastern end near the bottom, a curious ancient spur, evidently that of a warrior: it had been of steel, and was much wasted with rust. The radii of the goad or rowel measured half an inch. Nothing more was then found.

On Easter-eve, in the same year, I employed two steady men to dig and trindle the earth adjacent to the bed of the coffin. They found one small silver coin lying near the head of it, and several pieces of ornamented brass and iron work: the brass nearly decomposed to copperas, and partly to black earth, of which there was a considerable quantity. In the same place, fragments of pottery, apparently portions of an urn, were found, and also masses of putrified matter, and a great deal of baked or burnt earth. I directed the men to dig full four feet west of the coffin, and, as far as they went, portions of these articles, lying in a regular strata, were found, from two to three feet below the surface.

The penny was one of Robert Bruce's. The relics of ornamental brass and iron work, were probably the remains of the helmet of the warrior who was interred in the coffin. In 1318 Robert Bruce and his adherents had been excommunicated by the Pope, for contumacy to his Highness's messengers, and having assaulted and taken the fortress of Berwick, as well as those of the castles of Wark, Harbottle, and Mitford, and laid waste all the intervening country,* it is probable that this warrior now alluded to, fell at this juncture; and that the vicar of Chatton, on the strength of the above named papal anathema, refused sepulture to his remains, in any other part of the consecrated ground, than that of the north side of the church, the place in those times allotted, I believe, for the unhallowed interment of excommunicated unfortunates.

JOSEPH COOK.

* Smollet's Hist. of Eng. vol. iii. p. 258. Hume, vol. ii. p. 262, 372. Encyc. Brit. Art. Scotland, sec. 178, 179. 3d. ed.