

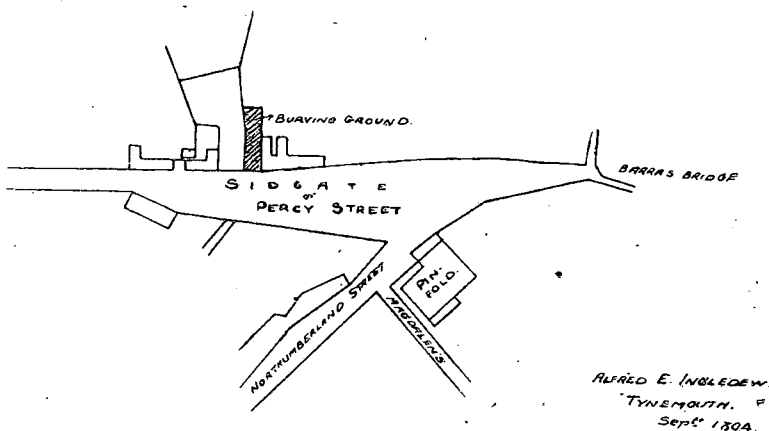
V.—THE 'QUIGS BURING PLAS IN SIDGATT,' NEWCASTLE, THE SWIRLE, AND THE LORT BURN.

BY DENNIS EMBLETON, M.D.

[Read on the 28th day of November, 1894.]

AT the request of Mr. Maberly Phillips, author of the paper on the above subject in a former volume of the *Archaeologia Aeliana*,¹ I visited, on August 23rd last, the excavations being carried on at the above place, the site of the once celebrated school of the Bruces, father and son, and quite recently of a public laundry. The history of this ground, so far as it could be recovered, was exhaustively related by Mr. Phillips in the above mentioned volume on November 28th, 1888. With this history it is far from my intention to interfere, it is my wish only to supplement it.

From 1683 to 1790 the site had been, in common with 'the Ballast Hills' at the east end of the town, the burial ground of ministers, and of members and their families, of certain dissenting communities of Newcastle who worshipped at the Castle Garth and other meeting houses.



Mr. Alfred E. Ingledew, of Messrs. Oliver and Leeson, architects, has kindly sent me a tracing from Hutton's map of Newcastle of 1775, showing the exact position of the graveyard with regard to

¹ Vol. xiii. pp. 234-251.

Sidgate or Percy street, and a sketch on a larger scale with dimensions and other interesting details.² The dimensions are :—Length, one hundred and ninety-four feet six inches ; width at lower end, forty feet six inches ; width at upper end, sixty-six feet three inches.

It lies parallel and close to the lowest part of St. Thomas's street at its east side, and is bounded on its east side by Mr. Sanderson's Hotspur brewery, at the north end by Mr. Slater's property, and at the south end by Sidgate or Percy street.

The ground consists of from three and a half feet to four and a half feet depth of ordinary soil, resting on a rather thin layer of yellow clay, below which is a thick bed of blue clay.

During the examination of the upper part of the ground an ancient watercourse was discovered called the Swirle, which had evidently been a long time diverted from its original course through the ground to a culvert constructed, most likely, about 1786, when the plot was being levelled and walled in, to carry the water away from the burials ; it was led along the west side of the ground down to Percy street, where it is supposed to have ended in a street sewer. The culvert was constructed of remarkably large and peculiarly formed stones, which must have belonged to some ancient ecclesiastical building. These will be more particularly noticed further on.

It is of some little interest first to trace the Swirle and its connection with the Lort burn.

The water of the Swirle came from somewhere about the middle of the Leazes underground to the top of the Quigs' burial place, and was there conveyed into the culvert above noticed, and so it went down Percy street and under the town wall at a short distance to the east of the old Newgate.

At the present time that water, I suppose, is made to issue continuously, *pro bono publico*, from a small stone pant which has been erected near to the south border of the Leazes, at a few yards above and to the west of the top of St. Thomas's street.

When, why, and from whom this little stream, and that also which exists at the end of Sandgate, received the name of *Swirle* does not appear, but it must be clear that they had never been connected with each other when the levels of the land between them are considered.

² p. 89.

In some of the old maps of Newcastle this Swirle is erroneously laid down as the head water of the Lort burn. Thus in Speed's, 1610, the Lort burn is represented as starting from the north side of Sidgate, running down Sidgate to the town wall under which it passes a little to the east of the Newgate, thence curving a little to the east it traverses the grounds of the 'New House,' and after passing under two separate rows of houses comes to the position of the High bridge at about the top of the old Butcher Market, under which it passes to the Dean, the lower part of the Side, and the east portion of the Sandhill to the Tyne.

In the map of 'Ralph Gardner, gent.' of 1654, engraved by Hollar, the Lort burn is shown as springing from the Leazes at some distance above St. Thomas's street, passing through the site of the future 'Quigs' Buring Plas,' then down Sidgate to and under the town wall somewhat nearer to Newgate than in Speed, then down Newgate street as far as the east end of Darn Crook, where it makes a sharp turn to the east, and is continued in the same course as in Speed to the river. In Hollar's map of the same date as Gardner's, the Swirle is represented as the Lort burn.

The real Lort burn, however, arises from the Nuns moor, beyond and to the west of the barracks, and probably from the long deserted coal works there, runs down the Barrack road into Gallowgate and Darn Crook as a considerable stream compared with the Swirle, which it receives as a small tributary at the point where the Swirle is represented as curving to the east, in Gardner's map, at the foot of Darn Crook in Newgate street, thence the Lort burn, running under the 'Chancellor's Head' public house, takes the course marked in the above maps as that of the Lort down to the Tyne.

Originally head stones or slabs had been placed over some of the bodies interred in this burial ground; these had subsequently been removed and placed against the side walls; later on they had been removed and dispersed, and later still some of them were discovered among very unsuitable surroundings.

Two of these stones are known to exist at present, one in the Unitarian church in New Bridge street, the other in the chapel of the castle. For record of the former see *Archæologia Aeliana*, vol. xiii. p. 235. A few human bones had been found in the soil of

the graveyard before excavation was begun, and also outside of the boundaries of the ground.

The excavation of the burial ground was begun at the lower or south end and continued gradually up to the north end until the whole of the soil and part of the clay were dug out and carted away, the bones found being collected and placed aside; the lowest part was quite dry, having been covered by the school buildings; the upper part was open and exposed to rainfall, and possibly also to leakage from the culvert, and the water being retained more or less in the soil by the clay, the ground was very wet, and decomposition of the bodies and the coffins had thus been greatly favoured.

Interments had been more frequent at the lower than at the upper part of the ground, but the greatest number was found at the east side about the middle. The number of graves indicated on the accompanying plan (p. 89) does not mean that they were the only interments found, for there were many others that had been made without coffins. The earliest deposited were the farthest gone in decomposition.

No grave, except one at the upper east side of the ground, was found at a greater depth than five feet six inches, but several had been placed within two feet of the surface, the exceptional case being that which lay quite in the clay bed, another was found inclosed in a case of lime, possibly that of some person who had died of a malignant fever, another case was that of a large skeleton lying directly over another smaller, possibly husband and wife. All the bodies were laid with their heads to the north. An unusually large coffin was met with, Mr. Ingledeu reports that the length of it was six feet eight inches, its greatest width two feet four inches, its head fourteen inches broad, its foot nine inches by six inches; its sides were made of two thicknesses of oak, and rounded towards the bottom like the sides of a boat, leaving a width of four inches on the flat. The bones within had not been specially noticed on exhumation; but among the collected bones I saw none of greater size than the femur noticed below as measuring nineteen and a half inches in length.

Over fifty skeletons in all were disinterred, but none quite entire, for the smaller bones of the hands and feet could scarcely be recognised, and only a few pelvic bones could be collected. The ends of the long bones buried in the seventeenth century were much

decayed away, or had become detached during the excavation. A piece of marble engraved with a crest was discovered in the excavation. There were skulls and other bones of women, but the great majority were those of men; none of children was obtained.

I produced at a previous meeting one of the most recent and best preserved skulls and lower jaw of the same, and one of the thigh bones of the same skeleton, which was the biggest I had noticed. These were well and strongly made, but the jaws had lost during life several of their molar teeth. It was not possible to examine the skull with care before the meeting; afterwards it and the femur were stolen by one of the labourers to whom they were entrusted to be carried back to the other bones, and the man was not to be found next day and has not been seen since. The femur measured nineteen and a half inches in length, which indicates a person of the stature of five feet nine inches or five feet ten inches. The average length of the human adult femur is eighteen inches. A second femur measured fourteen and three-quarter inches in length, and a third thirteen and a half inches, both probably those of women. The skull may have been that of a strong minister of mature or over middle age. The exhumed bones were collected, placed in three coffin-like boxes, which were interred near the position of the graveyard (see plan next page).

Mr. Alfred E. Ingledew, who has obligingly given me parts of the preceding information, has also afforded me the following:—

'There were also exhumed several wrought iron handles of coffins. They had all been fixed on the *ends*, not the sides, of these; they were beautifully turned and flanged, tapering to points, and fastened to the wood by double-tailed nails at the inside, where they were kept in position by a small square plate; in one instance, on the head of the coffin, was found a very large handle in position, and a portion of what had been the plate, but on attempting to clear off the soil from it it was destroyed, though the marks were still visible; below and at the lower end of this plate were two small shields, but so defaced that nothing could be distinguished on their surfaces. Around the whole of these ornaments were two circles, each of about one-eighth of an inch broad, cut in the wood, which was oak, and certain numerals were observed, of which only "14" was plainly to be seen, the rest could not be made out owing to the rough usage of the part by one of the labourers.'

'Whilst the culvert above noticed was being taken up, many very interesting stones were brought to light. It was a two feet square drain, the walls of which were formed of stones beautifully moulded, for instance, heads and sills of door-

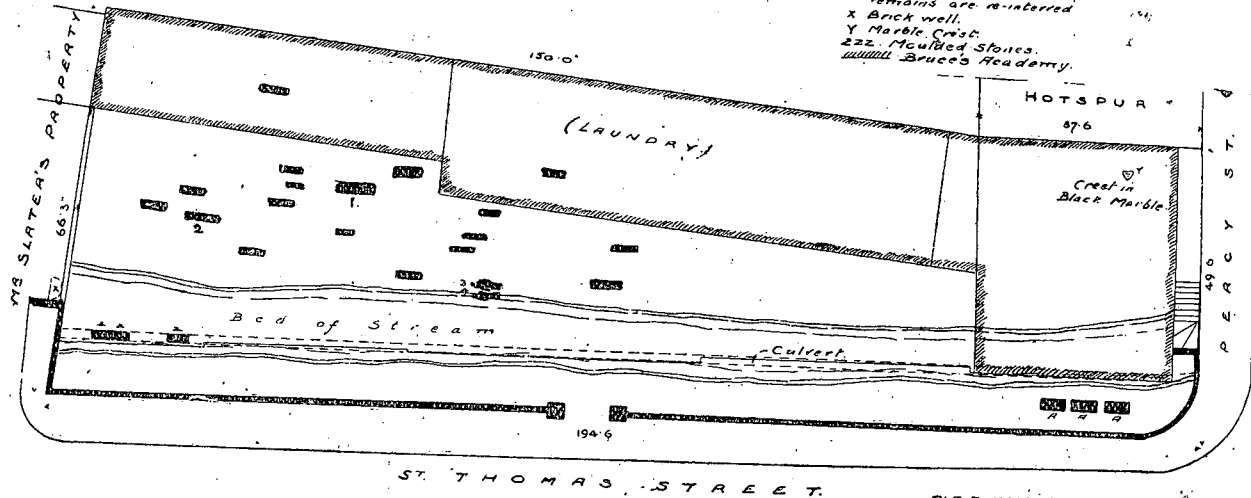
"QUIG'S BURING PLAS"

POSITIONS OF COFFINS ETC FOUND

NOTES.

- 1) Largest coffin found.
- 2) Body encased in lime.
- 3) Burial not buried in coffins
- 4) 1'6" below surface.

AAA. Exact positions where remains are re-interred
 X Brick well.
 Y Marble Crest.
 ZZ. Moulded Stones.
 Bruce Academy.



Scale of 1 inch = 10 feet

ALF. E. INGLEDEW,
TYNEMOUTH. 1894.

ways and windows, two very large jamb-stones with the mouldings in perfect condition, two large voussairs, or keystones of arches perfect and beautifully cut, mullions and portions of detached shafts, all of which had evidently come from some considerable sacred building, for on removing the last stone it turned out to be a part of the tracery of a very large window.

These stones, as their sculpture shows, belong to the Early English style of architecture.

In conclusion, I am strongly of opinion that the above stones, being of ecclesiastical origin and belonging to the Early English style of architecture, had once formed parts of the fabric of the old chapel of St. James at the Barras Bridge. The chapel and the Quigs' burial ground were only a few hundred yards apart. The houses that a few years ago stood on the site of the present Hancock museum of Natural History were built at the end of last century; at the time of their erection the ground must have been completely broken up and the remains of the dilapidated chapel of St. James would be dug up and disposed of, and that must have occurred about the time when the burial ground of the Quigs was being levelled and walled in, *i.e.* in 1786, when stones would be wanted for forming the culvert to carry the Swirle, threatening the burial place, into the proper direction. The proprietors of that place hearing of the excavations at St. James's, and, we must suppose, having had permission, carried off such of the exhumed stones as best suited their purpose, and thus made part of their culvert.

There is nothing to show who it was who gave away those consecrated stones. The few stones preserved in front of the museum are characteristically carved in Early English style, several showing the dog-tooth ornament of that style.