

## ON TWO ROMAN TOMBS

DISCOVERED IN DIGGING THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE NEW BUILDINGS OF THE MEDICAL SCHOOL AT ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S HOSPITAL.

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The Parish of Saint Bartholomew-the-Less, which is now altogether covered by the buildings of Saint Bartholomew's Hospital and College, has an ancient and respectable history. The venerable foundation, which carries out its original use with a vigour which has increased twentyfold with time, is older than most even of the ancient institutions of this old country. It was in existence before Magna Charta; it had flourished a long time before the House of Commons began. The parish deserves mention in the history of the intellectual and moral development of England, for it was the field of Harvey's daily work and it gave shelter to Strong,\* whose case was one of the first steps towards the abolition of slavery. It has served generation after generation of the poor in their hour of need for seven hundred and fifty years. We who live in it are fond of it and always think of it as a very old place, and I am glad to be able to lay before this Society some account of a discovery which adds seven hundred years to the history of our well-used ground.

The parish is of an irregular pentagonal shape. On the east it joins on to the grounds of Christ's Hospital. Its northern boundary is now called Duke Street, but in the old hospital books is called Duc Lane, a name which its mention in literature ought to have preserved from change :

\* In 1764.

“Some country squire to Lintot goes,  
 Inquires for Swift in verse and prose.  
 Says Lintot, ‘I have heard the name ;  
 He died a year ago ?’ ‘The same.’  
 He searches all the shop in vain ;—  
 ‘Sir, you may find them in Duck-lane :  
 I sent them with a load of books,  
 Last Monday, to the pastry-cook’s.’”

On the west the parish skirts the open space of Smithfield. On the south it used to be bounded by Rosemary Lane, which has now disappeared, and is replaced at its west end by a short recess from Giltspur Street called Windmill Court, beyond which Christ’s Hospital is again contiguous. The chief gate of the hospital is in the middle of the Smithfield front ; to the south of this the houses facing the open space slope a little to the south in one line till opposite a projecting angle of the opposite side of Smithfield. From this they slope still more to the south till the front is interrupted by Windmill Court. On this last part till last year stood a hospital gate, the shop of a surgical-instrument maker, and the shop of a baker. In a map of 1617 preserved among the hospital records the piece of street skirted by these houses, and reaching from Smithfield as far as the ends of Rosemary Lane on the east and Cock Lane on the west side of the street, is marked *PIE CORNER*. Modern writers have generally spoken of this locality, famous as the place at which the Great Fire of London stopped, as if it were merely the corner house of Cock Lane, but the name is in the old map written all along the little street, and, I think, applied to the whole of it. The word *corner* has in English a somewhat wider sense than its French original, *cornier*, which, with its Low Latin equivalent *corneria*, seems to have been applied strictly to an angle. English dictionaries agree in giving two senses to the word : first, that of angle, whether projecting or re-entering, and secondly, “any secluded spot,” as in the expression used in the authorized version in St. Paul’s speech before Agrippa : “For I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him ; for this thing was not done in a corner.”

A third sense may, I think, be added. Being first used for a bent street, the word came later to be applied to one piece of the bend, and thus, as in the existing example of Amen Corner and in the obsolete Pie Corner, the word corner was used for a short, narrow, unimportant street. Giltspur Street, sometimes called Knight-rider Street, leads

into Pie Corner, and reminds us of the days of jousts in Smithfield. Perhaps in Pie Corner was hung a pie or popinjay to be shot at, an English sport of those days. I may offer one other hypothesis to the curious in the etymology of street names, that the word *Pie* is here a corruption of the word *Pay*, and that some due was here exacted from those going to the tilt. The tendency to make a broad vowel slender is noticeable in the London dialect of English. Thus omnibus drivers offer to convey us to the *Bink*. I must, however, admit that I have been able to find no history of any due levied here, and tolls and taxes are rarely removed from their original place till long after their original use has passed away. To return to the place. The gate and houses were pulled down in October and November, 1877, and early in December considerable excavations were made at this point over a space about a hundred feet long and forty feet broad. At a depth of eleven feet, and at a spot one hundred and fifty feet, measuring along the houses, from the middle of the great gateway of the hospital, the workmen came upon what they took for two great blocks of stone, which lay half inside the front line of the new building and half under the footway of the street. Continuing their excavation they found that the stones were two great coffins lying side by side close together. A piece was broken off the lid of each, and in this state, before their contents had been disturbed at all, they were seen by Dr. Dyce Duckworth. In the southern sarcophagus was a leaden case containing a woman's skeleton. This was disturbed hastily, the workmen being anxious to secure the lead. The other sarcophagus contained two skeletons, a man's and a woman's. As these had been somewhat displaced when I saw them half an hour later, I will quote a note which Dr. Duckworth has kindly written to me as to their exact position—"The female faced west (the mediæval ecclesiastical position), the male faced east (layman's position)." The sarcophagi lay very nearly, but not precisely, east and west.

The next day they were further exposed, and near their east end two fragments of Roman brick and a short pillar broken off and with a circular moulding were found. Except for a few inches on each side, the gravel near these tombs was in its original strata. Further north under the hospital gate there were deeper foundations. No other relics of any kind were found over the area of the new building. It was quite clear that the sarcophagi had lain undisturbed from their first entombment to this day. The clerk of the works noticed for me

the exact position of the pillar. It lay slantingly at the end of the northern sarcophagus and the bricks were at each side. The moulding was upmost.

Mr. James Fergusson very kindly came down at once and pronounced the sarcophagi worth extracting, which was accordingly done in a day or two. The southern one had been so much injured by the blows it had received that it fell into several pieces, but the other is perfect, except that its lid is cracked across in two places. Your artist has made a drawing of these sarcophagi and of the pillar.

When extracted I examined them minutely. The two are of the same dimensions except that the one which was broken has thinner sides. The length is eighty-three inches. The width is twenty-eight and a half inches. The thickness of the sides of the one preserved entire is four and a half inches, of the sides of the other two and a half inches. The external height from the base to the top of the lid is thirty-one inches. The lids are seven inches thick. The ends are not quite square, and all the sides incline a little inwards. The floor is very uneven. The lids are very slightly rounded at the edge, but quite unadorned and without moulding, without slope, without any inscription. I examined all the angles carefully but found no ogmic lines. The inner edge of the sarcophagus has its angle cut off in a slope of one inch all round, and the lid has a corresponding bevel descending inwards. This makes the lid close the coffin very completely. The stone has a cut surface outside as well as inside. It has been hewn with a rough tool, and marks of cutting, which are all from above downwards, run in irregular wavy lines along the sides. The lead coffin had four sides and a floor, but I did not see a lid, and the clerk of the works who was on the spot when it was first exposed says that it had none. The lead is seven-sixteenths of an inch thick. Round the edges of the sides of the lead coffin is a cable moulding in a straight line, and between the edge lines the sides are adorned with a continuous diamond pattern of the same mouldings. The cable measures three-quarters of an inch in relief from side to side, and its strands are a quarter of an inch across. The stone pillar is narrower at one end than the other, and has a flattened longitudinal band on one side. It is encircled by a moulding at one end. The moulding is in two parts: a hollow and a convex part, the latter being slightly the wider. The other end of the pillar is broken short off but no fragments of stone lay near it. The fragments of brick are

one inch and three-sixteenths in thickness, which is the thickness of those described by Woodward (in 1707) as coming from the Roman wall. One has a piece of its corner unbroken, and on its under surface are two lines, which look as if the smoothing instrument had had a notch in it. The stone is an oolite limestone. The floor of the sarcophagi was covered with a whitish layer which could be scraped off, and of this substance a good deal adhered to the lead and some lay loose in each sarcophagus. Fourcroy, at the end of the last century, from observations made in Parisian cemeteries, and most writers on medical jurisprudence since his time, have described a substance of this appearance as found in graves as a result of the decomposition of bodies under certain circumstances. Moisture is usually stated to be necessary for the formation of adipocere, and in this case the inside of the sarcophagi was not quite dry but there was very little moisture. This substance was soapy when moist, and grew lighter and harder when made quite dry. When heated with potash it gave off ammonia. It was, no doubt, adipocere.

The bones were those of adults. The enormous muscular ridges on those of the man show that he must have been of extraordinary strength. He was probably somewhat above fifty years old. The woman was rather younger. Her skull has a proportionately larger forehead. The man's skull is long and has prominent cheek-bones. It closely resembles a skull in the museum of St. Bartholomew's Hospital, stated, on what authority I do not know, to be the skull of an ancient Briton. The teeth of both are well worn. The thigh-bone of the man is eighteen inches long, and his shin-bone fifteen and a half. I have not found any fractures, but there are signs of disease of the vertebræ—the eighth, ninth, and tenth—in (I think) the female skeleton. The signs are of long-continued disease: chronic arthritis or abscess. As the disease is almost confined to one side, and in the region of the psoas muscle, I am inclined to attribute the condition of the bone to the disease called psoas abscess, and I should judge that it had been recovered from and was not the cause of death. No other clue to the mode of death is given by the skeletons, but the broken pillar and the simultaneous burial of three individuals may point to some rapid and unexpected disease, perhaps an epidemic fever.

Such were the remains found. When was the burial made?

The tombs were at the edge of Smithfield and near the hospital. But this spot was not its burial-ground. The map of 1617 and later

maps show that the "burial-ground of the poor of the hospital" and the burial-ground of the parish lay on the east edge of the parish. A few months ago that region was excavated in digging the foundation of the new lavatories added at the south end of our women's wing, and I saw great numbers of skulls. Any connection with the hospital burial-ground may therefore be dismissed. The houses lately pulled down were the successors of those standing on the same spot in 1617. From that time the place was continuously covered with houses. But the district offers many other possible occasions of burial. Smithfield is spoken of as a place of execution from old times in a document of the fourth year of Henry III. :

"Furcae factae apud ulmellos comitatûs Middlesex ubi prius factae fuerunt ;"

but criminals would never have been buried with such care, and, moreover, the elms marking the place of execution are known to have been right on the other side of Smithfield, nearer to St. John's Gate. Smithfield was used as a place in which wager of battle was determined. In 1430 such a wager was fought there between two men of Feversham—"John Upton, notary, appellant; John Downe, gentleman, defendant"—and though the last case in which the wager was fought out, which was in the thirteenth year of Queen Elizabeth's reign, did not take place in Smithfield, it seems to have been often used in early times for the purpose.

"This trial," says Blackstone, "was only used in three cases: one military, one criminal, the third civil. The first in the court-martial or court of chivalry and honour, the second in appeals of felony, and the third upon issue joined in a writ of right, the last and most solemn decision of real property." All three kinds were at different times fought out on Smithfield. A full account of the method of procedure is to be found in the first edition of Blackstone. The combat was to begin at sunrise in the presence of the judges of the Court of Common Pleas, *after oath on the part of the combatants that they wore no charm and had practised no magic.* It was to continue till the stars came out, when a drawn battle decided in favour of the challenged. If it were not for the admirable prose in which the arrangements are gravely described it would hardly be possible to believe that one was reading from Sir William Blackstone writing in 1768.

Besides legal combats Smithfield was the scene of many tournaments, and now and then the violent sports of those days, like ours of football

and cricket, were fatal on the spot. Froissart tells how, in the forty-eighth year of Edward III., Dame Alice Perrers, as Lady of the Sun, rode from the Tower through Cheap with a long train of ladies, every lady leading a knight to Smithfield, where the joust lasted seven days. The names of several of the successful knights at a joust in the ninth year of Richard II. are preserved. Five years later, on the Sunday after Michaelmas, there was a great tournament. Sixty coursers with esquires upon them, led by as many ladies on palfreys by chains of gold, came through the city to Smithfield, and must have made a pageant not unequal to that in the "Flower and the Leaf":

"But their attire, like liveries of a kind,  
 All rich and rare, is fresh within my mind.  
 In velvet white as snow the troop was gowned,  
 The seams with sparkling emeralds set round ;  
 Their hoods and sleeves the same, and purfled o'er  
 With diamonds, pearls, and all the shining store  
 Of Eastern pomp, their long descending train  
 With rubies edged and sapphires swept the plain.  
 High on their heads, with jewels richly set,  
 Each lady wore a radiant coronet."

In 1393 the Earl of Mar tilted the Earl of Nottingham, and was violently thrown and had bones broken. Blood grew hot, and Sir William Darrell, standard-bearer of Scotland, challenged Sir Percy Courtney, and they rode several courses without victory.

"No slackness was there found,"

for another combat ensued, in which Sir Nicholas Hawberke, an Englishman, overthrew Cookborne, a Scot, after five courses.

But the entire absence of any Christian mark seems to me to exclude these tombs from a period when devotion flourished as a part of chivalry ; and, if the sportive or the legal combats of Smithfield would account for the man, the skeletons of the women could not be thus explained.

These then are not tombs of the middle ages, whether early or late. By a method of exclusion they thus are placed in the Roman times. It seems to me that the evidence is not merely negative. The Romans made sarcophagi like these. There is one such, of which a picture is given in Mr. Price's excellent work on Roman London, in the Guildhall Museum. It is made of a coarser oolite with large fossils, but in its shape and style it is identical. This tomb is probably of the same period as ours. It was found near the Fleet Ditch.

Mr. Price tells me that broken pillars are not unknown as Roman monuments, symbolizing unexpected death. The symbol is certainly Pagan, and its use is wholly opposed to the teaching of our religion. If this broken pillar be monumental, its occurrence in an early tomb at a period when Christians had almost to be restrained from seeking martyrdom, and when death was often spoken of as a season to be longed for, and its postponement regarded as a Divine penalty, is strong evidence that these are Pagan tombs. If the pillar be not monumental its style would warrant us in assuming it to be a piece of some Roman building. If the tombs are Pagan they are too artistic to be anything but Roman. The Romans, we know, buried outside the wall. The nearest bit of Roman wall is in Newgate Street. It, or its later successor, which was further out, ran across Newgate Street, then along near the great hall of Christ's Hospital, and then between the ground of St. Bartholomew's and of Christ's Hospital towards Aldersgate.

Two monks kneeling at the feet of our founder, Rayhere, on his tomb in the church of St. Bartholomew the Great, are reading a verse of Isaiah, which is put there to tell of the waste condition of Smithfield in his day. It was an open piece of ground, marshy in parts. Long after a pond remained on one side of it. Some traces of the waste still lurk in the ground, for I have treated several patients for ague, for which I could find no other source than their residence in the part of the district bordering on the Fleet ditch. From Rayhere's time back it was probably waste land outside the walls. Fragments of pottery confirmed the Roman character of the tomb by the Fleet ditch, and, though these are wanting for ours, their style, the broken pillar, their position with regard to the wall, seem to me to establish the fact that they were Roman.

Being Roman, to what period between the first mention of our city in the reign of Nero to the end of the Roman sway in Britain under Honorius do they belong? The earliest Roman burials in Britain are in urns. The custom of burying superseded cremation, wholly or in part, as Sir Thomas Browne tells us from Macrobius, in the fourth century. The Roman manners were not of course destroyed as soon as the legions were withdrawn, so the burial might be later than A.D. 420. But the times must have been troubled, and the nearest quarry of oolite is a long way off. It is perhaps not too fanciful to suppose that great blocks like these would only be brought from



Northamptonshire or Oxfordshire in peaceful times. I therefore conjecture that these citizens of London were laid in their grave shortly before the end of the Roman occupation of Britain, and that when we disturbed their bones they had been lying under the growth and turmoil of London for fourteen hundred years and more. The contrast between the long quiet of their rest and the restless business above them was striking indeed, and brought to one's mind the lines of a poet whom they perhaps had read—

“ Tu secunda marmora  
 Locas sub ipsum funus et sepulchri  
 Immemor, struis domos.”

If we have disturbed their bones we will at least preserve their memory, for we mean to place these traces of the oldest inhabitants of our parish in our new library. A member of your Society would have thrown more light on these tombs than I have been able to do, but I can offer the excuse that I had the example of another Fellow of the College in writing upon a Roman burial, and his words shall be my justification and conclusion—

“ Beside, to preserve the living and make the dead to live, to keep men out of their urns and discourse of human fragments in them, is not impertinent unto our profession, whose study is life and death, who daily behold examples of mortality, and of all men least need artificial nementoes or coffins by our bedside to mind us of our graves.”