



Notes and Queries

RELATING TO BERKS, BUCKS AND OXON.

Communications are invited upon all subjects of Antiquarian or Architectural interest relating to the three counties. Correspondents are requested to write as plainly as possible, on one side of the paper only, with REPLIES, QUERIES and NOTES on SEPARATE SHEETS, and the name of the writer appended to each communication.

Notes.

FONT AT LONG COMBE.—This summer, while visiting Long Combe, near Woodstock, with the Oxford Architectural and Historical Society, my attention was called by the Vicar, the Rev. S. Spencer Pearce, to the remains of a very beautiful Perpendicular Font, which is now doing duty as a *well head* in a cottage garden in the village. This use of a font is perhaps less reprehensible than many to which our ancient fonts have been put, as there is no doubt that in bygone times many wells were considered sacred, and were devoted to baptismal purposes. The very beautiful Italian well heads, carved and ornamented with Christian symbols (casts of which may be seen in the Art Museum at South Kensington), were undoubtedly examples of this. The well at Long Combe is, however, used for domestic and not religious ceremonies, and it does seem a pity that a font of so much interest should not be replaced in the Church, more especially as many remains of the Perpendicular Church of Circa, 1395, are still there preserved. One of these is a stone pulpit, the tracery of which is similar to that on seven sides of the Font, which is octagonal; the eighth side is occupied by a kneeling figure apparently holding a book, the head is much defaced, and it is not possible now to discover for whom it was intended, but it was very probably the donor of the Font. Inscriptions recording the names, or figures representing the persons of such donors are to be found on Early Fonts, but I do not remember any other instance similar to this, of a single kneeling figure occupying an entire compartment of an octagonal Perpendicular Font, the other sides being filled with tracery. The dimensions of the Font are as follows:—Height from ground 25 inches, width across 31 inches, length of each face of octagon 13 inches, height of kneeling figure 14 inches. It appears from Mr. Parker's "Guide to the Architectural Antiquities in the neighbourhood of Oxford" (p. 154) to have been in use in the Church in 1846. The rood

screen of "Perpendicular work, but with tracery of Decorated Forms" mentioned also by Mr. Parker, has disappeared, with the exception of a very tiny piece now in possession of the Vicar. He takes great interest in his church, and has within the last two years found and uncovered some very remarkable frescoes on the Chancel arch.—EMMA SWANN, Walton Manor, Oxford.

It is most earnestly to be desired that this curious and interesting font should be restored to the Church. The remarkable stone pulpit and font at Long Combe should certainly be preserved together.—EDITOR.

DENCHWORTH CROSS.—Our attention has been called to the fact that the shaft of the old cross at Denchworth has been knocked down, and is now lying in the road. The Secretary of the Berks Archæological Society has communicated with the Vicar on the subject, and we trust that some steps may soon be taken to preserve and restore this interesting relic. There are few village crosses left in Berks, and we cannot afford to lose those which time has hitherto spared.—EDITOR.

The Vicar writes to say that he is about to restore the cross to its former position. No funds are available for this purpose, and any help will be gratefully received.

RECENT EXCAVATIONS AT SILCHESTER.—The systematic excavation of the site of the large Roman town at Silchester, under the auspices of the Society of Antiquaries, was resumed, for the sixth year in succession, at the beginning of May, the scene of operations being a hitherto unexplored insula, or square, lying midway between the basilica and west gate. This insula has been found to be almost entirely covered with the foundations of two very large houses, each of which had a courtyard facing north and entered from the main street on that side by a gateway of considerable importance. The easternmost house has a street frontage of more than 200ft. and extends backwards for over 150ft. Its principal chambers were on the west side and had mosaic floors, unhappily almost entirely destroyed. A vestibule in the north part of the house, about 12ft. wide and 50ft. feet long, has fortunately nearly the whole of a very remarkable mosaic pavement. It consists of a groundwork of common red and drab mosaic, arranged in long bands or panels, filled with squares or lozenges, and coupled by frets. In this are set, in somewhat capricious fashion, no fewer than five, if not six, panels of fine mosaic work of excellent design. First, there are two small squares, each 2ft. across, placed side by side with an interval of a few inches. Then comes a large panel, 6ft. square, with a bust (unfortunately much injured) within a circular border. Beyond this is a long and narrow panel of interlacing work, and beyond this again the remains of a fine panel (or, perhaps two placed end to end) over 20ft. long, which has evidently been almost entirely destroyed within the last few years through the agency of a "scarifier." Very few instances of so elaborate a combination of coarse and fine mosaic patterns have come to light in Britain. The occurrence, therefore, of so curious and perfect an example at Silchester is noteworthy. At the west end of the vestibule is a small room on a lower level, with a very perfect floor of drab mosaic with a central panel of fine work, but this is injured in the centre. Against its east wall are the remains of a fireplace, a most uncommon feature in Romano-British

houses. The other house is quite as extensive as the first. Its plan resembles that of most of the large houses found at Silchester, and of the principal Roman villas in this country, a series of chambers lined by corridors and arranged round three sides of the courtyard. Only the principal wing, that on the east, has as yet been completely uncovered, but in this, besides two rooms warmed by hypocausts, are no fewer than five other rooms, all of considerable size with mosaic floors. The northernmost room has in the centre a large panel of fine mosaic, about 15ft. square, composed of five large circles within octagons, and filled with stars and geometrical figures, the whole being enclosed by a broad border of braid work and set in a ground of red tesserae. The colours used are black, white, red and yellow. About three-fourths of this pavement is intact. The next room has an almost perfect mosaic pavement composed entirely of fine black and white tesserae, arranged in 81 squares or panels of geometrical design coupled by fretwork. It measures about 14ft. by 16ft. and is set in a ground of coarse red tesserae. The next room had a fine mosaic pavement of about the same size as that just described, composed of 16 octagonal panels of black, white, red and yellow tesserae, but unfortunately almost the whole is destroyed. A passage paved with ordinary red tesserae separates the three northernmost chambers from the other two. One of these has a plain red pavement only. The southernmost chamber retains a nearly perfect mosaic centre, about 14ft. square, formed of nine hexagonal panels with floral and other devices, all of good design and character. Whether any other fine mosaics will be found in the other parts of the house remains to be seen, as at present only the lines of the walls have been traced. It is hoped that it will be found practicable to remove the better preserved pavements to the Reading Museum, where the Silchester Loan Collection has been deposited by the Duke of Wellington.

The Rev. A. Cheales, who has recently visited Silchester, writes:—The two Western Insulae, near the West Gate, have at the present date (6th September) been pretty fully worked out, and filling in is now going on rapidly; another month remains, but fresh ground is not likely to be opened, and the investigation of various primary pits and wells will probably occupy the time of the fewer workmen now engaged, and result in some interesting additions to the bronzes and pottery. One thing is absolutely evident, that no two buildings on anything like the same scale have before been uncovered, whilst the pavements found far surpass in size and excellence any before arrived at. It is stated that, up to the present time, nothing whatever has been discovered that gives any clue to the condition or position of the occupants. Doubtless a very wise reticence. Had Mr. Joyce been presiding, "*ex pede Herculem*," we should have had all exactly elaborated even to the length of his club. The cold clear light of a rigid exactitude does not admit of conjecturing. It is probably safer. It is certainly less interesting. The two latest found pavements are the two most perfect and striking. One is of a geometrical pattern of black and white tesserae very well preserved. The other has a straight line border of white, then a scroll pattern border of red, black, and white, and then, within this, nine bold patterns beautifully varied in the same three colours. Six of these are nearly perfect, the other three are not very seriously injured. Altogether the impression given is that the season has been exceedingly favourable, and that the results of the excavations may be regarded as highly satisfactory.