



# The Berks, Bucks & Oxon Archæological Journal.

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## Gossip of an Antiquary.

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The growth of Berkshire books is amazingly increasing, and the library will be well furnished which contains them all. At the present moment I find four new books relating to the County. This increased production of local books is most creditable to Berkshire scribes. May they continue their good work, which will hereafter be consummated in the Victoria County History, the first volume of which is now on the highway to completion.

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The first volume which lies before me is *Wantage Past and Present*, composed by the joint labours of Miss Gibbons and Mr. E. C. Davey, F.G.S. The preface by the late Lord Lieutenant of the County, Lord Wantage, has a pathetic interest, as the hand is still that penned the words. He quotes the words of our late revered Bishop, who said that "a very great many persons can find in the following up of local and personal history a connection with the greater streams of social and political history that is full of direct interest." That is certainly one of the many true words which the good Bishop spoke, and would that many other writers would follow the example of Miss Gibbons, who has made it a labour of love to gather together a mass of valuable information and to shape it skilfully into a series of pictures of Wantage in the past and in the present.

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Certainly Miss Gibbons has a theme worthy of her labours. Wantage is Roman, Saxon and Norman, the birthplace of our

greatest King, and of one of our greatest theologians. The authors trace its history from prehistoric times with its camps and earthworks through the Anglo-Saxon, Norman, Mediæval and Stuart periods until the present day. There are interesting chapters on the history of the Church, the Charities and the geology, and the book has several good illustrations.

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From the same neighbourhood comes a charming book *Travels Round Our Village* by Miss Hayden (Constable, London), which is altogether delightful. It is redolent of the country, and never since Miss Mitford first sung the praises of our Berkshire villages have the short and simple annals of the poor been so charmingly told. Miss Mitford loved our meadows, hedgerows and country lanes. Miss Hayden admires her down country with the wide sweep of arable land, its constant variety of changing crops and the canopy of sky. But both love the Berkshire rustic, with his quaint ways, his curious lingo and honest worth. The authoress of *Travels Round Our Village* has a keen sense of humour and knows how to appreciate it. The reply of the lonely rustic, who lived miles from a surgery, to a doctor who asked how he obtained medical assistance, may be quoted—"Well Sir, we dwun't ha' no doctor, we just dies a nat'ral death!"

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The authoress describes an historic country. It is region of the Ridgeway, the old Ickleton Street and the Portway. The old "pathway of the tribes" across Britain, still echoes with the tread of Roman legionaries and of the men of Wessex who fought with Alfred against the marauding Danes. The White Horse glitters in the distance, and the fir-topped Hurst of Cumnor, and Sinodun with its British camp and many an ancient barrow and earthwork round which cluster the vague superstitions and local legends of our Berkshire folk. Some of these Miss Hayden records, and we still ask for more. But the chief charm of the book is its literary style, its pathos, its humour, its true and life-like descriptions of country life. Nor must I omit to accord to Mr. Leslie Brooks his meed of praise for his charming illustrations, which add much to the attractiveness of this fascinating village book. Berkshire readers will especially appreciate its many excellences.

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Mr. Worsfold has reprinted his learned paper contributed to the Journal of the British Archæological Association on the principal

megalithic remains of the Morbihan Archipelago under the title of *The French Stonehenge* (Bemrose, London). He has made several additions and given us a large number of excellent illustrations, which will enable many who have never visited Brittany to compare menhirs, dolmens and cromlechs which abound in that country with our British prehistoric remains. The author takes us to the world-famed Carnac and Locmariaquer and tells us of the vast stone monuments, more lasting than brass, set up to the memory of the Unknown Race who lived and died in this remote corner of the world. He tells us of the superstitions which cluster around them, of the uses which the Romans made of them, of the religious and political assemblies that took place under their shadow. But the chief value of the work to the antiquary is the comparison drawn between our circles at Stonehenge and Avebury and those in Brittany, which the writer pronounces to be cœval.

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I have left too long Mr. Inman's learned work on *Domesday and Feudal Statistics* (Elliot Stock) without notice. The fact is that it is no light reading and requires more careful study than I have been able to devote to its erudite pages. It is too learned for gossip, perhaps a little too scornful and caustic. Thus does he slay an Oxford Professor—"it is to be hoped that the promoters of the Agricultural Education Extension System from our fountains of learning may commence at home, by giving those pioneers who are to enlighten the supposed darkness of the rural mind, such an elementary knowledge of arithmetic, as to place them on somewhat more even terms with the average *carucarius* in matters of simple addition, division, &c." The book should be read by all students of "Domesday." It combats the theory that one plough could till 120 acres of arable land; it tells that the *Sochemanni* or Yeomen of Norfolk and Lincoln have been greatly overestimated, and establishes many other important theories; but why should Mr. Inman be so angry with those who differ from him?

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The limner of "Prehistoric Peeps" has, I think, represented an early game at golf, where clubs were of a primitive type and balls were stones, and greens were—well—a "trifle tricky." On the new golf links at Sunningdale have been discovered some prehistoric remains which are of some interest. Mr. Collier and Mr. Shrubsole have examined them, and I hope that they will enable me to give a detailed account of their finds in the next Journal.