NOTES

TOMB RECESS DISCOVERED IN BURNHAM CHURCH

BY

E. CLIVE ROUSE

During alterations in the North Transept of St. Peter's Church, Burnham (until recently the Dropmore family pew), the panelling was removed, and a large arched tomb recess was disclosed in the North wall. When first discovered the crown of the arch was destroyed and the whole recess was walled up solid with chalk and flint rubble masonry. A test opening at one side revealed that the plastered back of the recess retained its painted decoration; and the vicar, the Rev. Hugh Read, decided to have the whole opened up, restored and preserved.

This was a matter of some difficulty as the tomb could not be unblocked until support had been given to the large window and walling above; and the space between the crown of the arch and the sill was very restricted—a matter of not a great many inches. However, Mr. Rix, of Burnham, was consulted, and he was successful in inserting a steel beam by means of "needling" below the whole length of the window, its ends projecting beyond the window jambs and supported on blue brick piers built back into chases cut in the wall, thus stabilising and supporting the whole gable and window. The recess was then cleared, the crown of the arch restored (blocks of clunch taken from the filling being used where possible for cutting the new voussoirs), the sill rebuilt at its proper level, and the surrounding walls replastered so that none of the structural repairs is visible. The original plaster was then repaired and the painting cleaned and treated with preservative.

Tomb recess, with original painting, c. 1220, after restoration, discovered in Burnham Church.

Photo, H. W. Freels, Burnham.

The work is apparently contemporary with the building of the North Transept itself (ascribed to c.1220—30 by the Royal Commission) and may be described as a founder's tomb. It is unusually large being 7ft. 6ins. in length, and about 4ft. from the sill to the apex of the arch. Its depth is about average. The arch is segmental and depressed, and enclosed with a continuous, deeply cut round-and-hollow moulding, ending with well-moulded water-holding bases, the fronts of which are mutilated. The plaster covering the back, soffit, and jambs of the recess was badly cracked and perished by damp; but it was possible to save the greater part of it together with its scheme of painting. (See plate).

This consists of an outline and single masonry lines in a dark plum red faded to ochre in the lower portions more affected by damp. An effect of shading is given to the joints by painting a black line below the horizontal and to the left of the vertical joints. In the masonry spaces pairs of pierced sexfoils (sometimes they are cinquefoils) alternate with crescents having two small roundels within them of the same colour as the masonry lines. These also have occasionally faded to a red brown or ochre colour, and in some it would appear that a vermilion had been used. In the centre at the top is a most elaborate foliated cross within a circle 18 ins. in diameter. The ground is yellow, and the arms of the cross, outlined in black, seem to have been of a brilliant red as well as the bordering circle now mostly faded to a pale pink. Each arm ends in a rough capital from which spring two branches of rather heavy, stiff foliage delicately lined in black. In the centre is a diamond shaped panel and there are traces of green bordering the foliage. This design is distinctly unusual in a tomb recess. The cross is clearly not one of the set of twelve interior consecration crosses on account of its position. One expects masonry or scroll ornament in a tomb recess, or certain figure subjects—a Majesty as at Little Missenden, a Resurrection, a Crucifixion, or a soul being carried to Heaven in a napkin by angels. The emphasis laid on " The

Cross and Crescent '' motive is interesting, and if both had not been for so long quite normal components in Romanesque and Gothic ornament, one might have ventured the suggestion that the person commemorated was a crusader. On the soffit at the west end are the letters A.D. in Lombardic script, and bright red in colour. It was unfortunately the only piece of plaster surviving in this position, so one will not know if they were ever connected with a date or name.

Certain other features are rather curious. At the west end of the recess is a smaller, secondary recess clearly cut after the original back wall had been plastered and painted, and mutilating the design. It was plastered in plain white when first uncovered, but the plaster was so rotten it has had to be renewed, retaining, however, the exact contours of the original recess. There are two possible explanations for this. It may have been scooped out for a small secondary interment after the original one. Or, as Professor Tristram has suggested to me, it may have been to accommodate the arm, elbow or shield of an effigy. Such effigies were made in recognised workshops, notably in certain centres in the Nottingham and Derby areas; and a miscalculation in size might easily have been made. So that when the effigy arrived, the sill of the tomb recess was found to be too narrow: the medieval workmen would have had no compunction whatever in hacking away enough of the back wall at one end to accommodate it, afterwards plastering the sides of the hollow they had made.

Then one has to account for the complete absence of any part of such an effigy at Burnham, and find a reason for the mutilation and blocking up of so obviously important a person's tomb. The loss of a whole effigy, if one ever existed, is puzzling: and one can only suppose that it was removed a very long time ago and has since disappeared in a way that objects left loose about a church seem to have. Which brings one to the question of the blocking of the recess itself. I assume this to have been done in the 14th century,

possibly about 1360, the date, according to the Royal Commission, of the large and handsome Decorated window in the North gable of the transept above the tomb. The amount of structural work necessitated by the insertion of this window must have been great, and the stability of the whole transept was probably endangered (it has been patched and repaired, and strengthened by iron ties on many occasions since). As has been said, the top of the tomb recess arch comes within a foot or so of the window; and for structural security I suspect that it was then considered necessary to remove the crown of the arch and fill the recess up solid. The effigy, if any, was removed, likewise the sill of the tomb and the stone coffin and lid with the body, supposing there was a stone coffin, and the whole was then built up from floor level. Nothing was found in the excavated material except a handful of bones—parts of arm and leg bones and of a very thin skull apparently thrust back anyhow into the little recess before it was blocked up. What became of the rest of the skeleton and of the effigy or coffin, one does not know.

In excavating the transept down to the original floor level (it had been built up a foot or two when the Fortescue Vault and Pew were made), one or two encaustic tiles of the usual late 14th century type were found: as well as a fragment of a Purbeck marble slab having indents of a brass apparently of a lady in horned or wide headdress with scroll inscriptions. The base of a small clunch shaft with its original colouring was also found. The recovery of this important tomb recess with its original scheme of colour decoration makes a valuable addition to the fittings of the church. It is hoped eventually to restore the transept to its use as a chapel and fit it up with an altar.

CHALK ROCK FOSSILS FROM LATIMER.

For some years past Dr. K. P. Oakley and myself have been collecting fossils from a disused chalk-pit in the valley of the Chess near Latimer. The pit is situated on the south side of the road leading from Chesham to Chenies, and a quarter of a mile S.E. of Blackwellhall Farm. It is some thirty feet deep; but owing to the accumulation of scree only the higher part of the face is now visible. This discloses the following section:—

Chalk with flints and clay piping...	8 ft.
Chalk Rock	2 ft.
Very hard, blocky chalk, passing into rock at intervals	7 ft.
Chalk Rock	6 ins.
Chalk containing *Terebratulina*.	

The strata at this point are practically horizontal, and a very similar section is exposed in a larger quarry on the hill-side directly south of Chesham.

In this district the Chalk Rock occurs uniformly at the bottom of the Planus Zone of the Upper Chalk, marking the junction of that formation with the underlying Middle Chalk. It is represented by one or more bands of hard, blocky or nodular limestone: the blocky facies deep cream in colour, and marked with bluish-black dendrites; the nodular parts streaked with dark green and brown, and containing grains of glauconite and phosphatic material (probably collophanite). Both are often highly fossiliferous. The fossils, however, can only be extracted easily after the rock has weathered, when it presents a rough and friable surface with many small cavities.

The faunal assemblage differs markedly from that of the intervening and adjacent chalk, chiefly in the presence of numerous species of cephalopods and gastropods, all of which are characteristic of the so-

called " Reussianum Sub-Zone ". The type-species itself, however, *Hyphantoceras reussianum* (D'Orbigny), is rare in Buckinghamshire, being generally replaced by the less widely-known *H. woodsi* (Kitchin), which was first recorded from this county. Similarly, the ammonite *Prionocyclus*, so common at the horizon at which the main Chalk Rock occurs in many parts of the south of England, is here replaced by two species of *Pachydiscus*. With these exceptions, the pit on the Chesham-Chenies road has yielded us a remarkably comprehensive " Reussianum " fauna, of which the following is a list:—

PORIFERA

Cliona cretacea (Portlock)
Guettardia stellata Michelin
Ventriculites alcyonoides Mantell
" *decurrens* T. Smith
" *impressus* T. Smith
" *infundibuliformis* S. Woodward
" *mammillaris* T. Smith
" *radiatus* Mantell
Verrucocoelia tuberosa Hinde
Aphrocallistes sp.

ANTHOZOA

" Parasmilia centralis " Auctt.

BRACHIOPODA

Cyclothyris mantelliana (J. de C. Sowerby)
" *octoplicata* (J. Sowerby)
" *plicatilis* (J. Sowerby)
" *reedensis* (Etheridge)
Gibbithyris ellipsoidalis Sahni
" *merensis* Sahni
" *subrotunda* (J. Sowerby)

LAMELLIBRANCHIATA

Crassatellites equisulcatus (Woods)
Cardita cancellata Woods
Cardium turoniense Woods
Corbis morrisoni Woods

Cuspidaria cordata Nilsson
Inoceramus costellatus Woods
Nuculana siliqua (Goldfuss)
Ostrea semiplana J. de C. Sowerby
Ostrea sp.
Oxytoma seminudum (Dames)
Spondylus latus (J. Sowerby)
„ *spinosus* (J. Sowerby)
Trapezium rectangulare Woods
„ *trapezoidale* (F. A. Roemer)

GASTROPODA

Cerithioderma sp. ?
Cerithium saundersi Woods
Crepidula sp.
Dentalium turoniense Woods
Eriptycha humboldti (Müller)
Naticina vulgaris (Reuss)
Pleurotomaria perspectiva (Mantell)
Solariella gemmata (J. de C. Sowerby)
Trochus berocscirensis Woods
„ *schlüteri* Woods
Trochus sp.
Turbo geinitzi Woods
„ cf. *leblanci* D'Archiac

CEPHALOPODA

Allocrioceras ellipticum (Mantell)
Cyrtocheilus bohemicus (Fritsch & Schloenbach)
Hyphantoceras woodsi (Kitchin)
Nautilus (Eutrephoceras) sublaevigatus D'Orbigny
Pachydiscus cricki Spath
„ *sharpei* Spath
Scaphites geinitzi D'Orbigny
Scaphites sp. nov.

ECHINODERMATA

Echinocorys scutatus Leske
Holaster planus (Mantell)
Micraster leskei (Des Moulins)
„ *praecursor* Rowe
Isocrinus agassizi (Von Hagenow)

ANNELIDA

Serpula ampullacea J. de C. Sowerby
Serpula sp.

PISCES

Oxyrhina sp.
Edaphodon sp.

From the chalk between and above the Chalk Rock seams the following species have been collected:—

Ventriculites radiatus Mantell
Cyclothyris reedensis (Etheridge)
Terebratulina striata Davies *non* Wahlenberg
Ostrea vesicularis Lamarck
Ostrea sp.
Spondylus spinosus (J. Sowerby)
Echinocorys scutatus Leske
Enoploclytia leachii (Mantell)
Oxyrhina sp.

Of the Chalk Rock species listed here, several are new to the area; and *Oxytoma seminudum* (Dames) has not hitherto been recorded from above the Cenomanian. I am grateful to Mr. C. P. Chatwin for the identification of some of the gastropods and lamellibranchs. The *Trochus* sp. has been deposited at the Geological Survey; the new *Scaphites* and some of the sponges at the British Museum (Nat. Hist.); a representative part of the remainder of the collection is being presented to the County Museum at Aylesbury, in the hope that it will there prove to be of some interest to students of the palaeontology of this district.

F. A. Lea.

POLISHED AXE FROM COP ROUND BARROW, BLEDLOW

BY

E. D. EVENS and F. S. WALLIS

In Records of Buckinghamshire Vol. XIII (1938), Pt. V, Mr. J. F. Head, F.S.A., describes excavations at Cop Round Barrow, Bledlow. On p. 329 *loc. cit.*, Mr. W. F. Grimes, M.A., F.S.A., mentions a fragmentary polished axe of greenstone. Macroscopically, the rock appears to be a greenish-grey, fine and close-grained altered sedimentary rock. Microscopically, Dr. J. Phemister (in litt. to Dr. F. J. North), has described the rock as a calc-silicate hornfels with amphibole, lime scapolite and sphene.

The present writers are indebted to Dr. F. J. North for bringing the axe to their notice, and it has been examined in connection with the investigations of a Sub-Committee of the South-Western Group of Museums and Art Galleries appointed for the petrological identification of stone implements. It has been numbered 179 in their system of registration.

During the course of these investigations another axe No. 133 from Northern Scotland (Mr. J. G. Marsden collection) has been examined. This is remarkably similar to the Bledlow axe except for the fact that it is slightly coarser in grain. It would be premature at the present stage to assert that both axes came from the same original provenance, but the striking similarity is here recorded in the possible event of future research filling in the gaps in a hypothetical route including the Chiltern Hills and Northern Scotland.

When collecting specimens from the greenstone areas of Cornwall and Devon, the writers also obtained material from the adjacent altered killas. One of these from a point on Hellesveor Cliff about 300 yards

East of Hor Point, near St. Ives, Cornwall, is very similar to the above mentioned axes, the chief difference being that the sphene is replaced by ilmenite and the needles of amphibole are fewer. These are minor differences from the petrological standpoint. A pebble from Porthmeor Beach, St. Ives, is also similar.

Taking into account the rapid variation amongst these altered killas in the field, it can be stated that the Bledlow axe was obtained from this type of rock and that the original provenance is possibly in the neighbourhood of St. Ives.

J. F. Head.