

THE LAST GIBBET IN BUCKINGHAMSHIRE.

BIERTON VICARAGE,
April 18, 1860.

DEAR SIR,

I know not whether any record of what is considered the last gibbet erected in Bucks may be allowed a corner in your Magazine. If, however, you deem it worthy of insertion, it may interest some of your readers, and may call forth some remarks on similar relics of the past. I may add, that I am indebted to a parishioner for the collection of facts.

I am, Sir,

Yours most truly,

J. WHARTON.

To Rev. C. LOWNDES.

In the Parish Register of Bierton, in the year 1773, we find the following entry :—" June 10th, Mary Holt, spinster, was buried ; she died June 4th, and Richard Holt, widower, he being most barbarously murdered in his bed-chamber on the 7th day, at night."

Corbet, a rat-catcher and chimney-sweep, living at Tring, had been engaged at Bierton for some days previously to this entry, and amongst other places, it is said, he was employed on the premises of Richard Holt, a small farmer, whose daughter Mary was then lying dead. It is said that when Corbet arrived at the house, he saw through a window Holt engaged in prayer. Having waited till his victim was asleep, by means of a ladder placed against a chimney, he effected a descent into the house, and murdered Holt. It is said traces of blood still remain on the floor of the house. Corbet having secured his plunder, then hastened to depart by the door of the house, on opening which, his dog unobserved by him, ran in, and was thus left behind. On the milk-boy going to his master's house in the morning, and finding him not up, the attention of the neighbours was directed to the fact, and on opening the door they at once recognized the dog as the property of Corbet. Guided by the dog who followed the scent of his master, the constable succeeded in apprehending Corbet at Tring, with some of the stolen property in his possession. He was tried, found guilty,

and condemned to death at the forthcoming Midsummer Assize. The son of James Durley, the parish clerk, then a lad sixteen years of age, used to say he walked behind the cart, through the village of Bierton, to the place of execution, which was in the corner of a field on the right-hand side of the road leading from Bierton to Hulcott. Young Durley remarked, "The front was about eighteen feet high, and served both for gallows and gibbet. I saw the cart drawn under the gallows, and after he was dead, I saw his body incased in irons, and hung up; the road was impassable for a furlong each side of the part, from the crowds who came to witness the execution."

Benjamin Green, who was born in Aylesbury in 1785, and died in Amersham Union in 1857 or 1858, stated that his father, who was a blacksmith, made the ironwork of the gibbet.

The spot where the gibbet was erected is distant from the house in which the murder was committed, about seventeen chains, and the field since the inclosure has been called "Corbet's Piece," while the lane facing the western boundary of the field has acquired the title of "Gib Lane."

Mary Lane, who lived servant at the farm-house adjoining, could see as she sat up in her bed, the body of the murderer hanging from the gibbet; and the farmers who live higher up the village say that their parents were unable to open their windows until after the following harvest in consequence of the smell from the decomposing body.

In 1774, a sporting character, passing through Bierton, offered an old shepherd 2s. 6d. to climb the post and draw a pair of black gloves over the hands of Corbet, and to hang a black scarf over the face, a feat which he successfully accomplished.

In 1795, a "constant reader" of the "Bucks Herald" says, "I went to Bierton Feast, and then the gibbet was standing, and to the irons was attached a human skull, which was the skull of the man who had committed the murder." He further adds, "my father assisted at the erection of the gibbet."

The irons remained some years after this until worn away by the action of the swivel from which they were suspended; they were then kicked into the ditch, where it

is believed they rotted away ; the remainder of the post was used for a gate-post, and, it is said, is still upon the same farm.

I should likewise add, that the footpath running from " Chalk-house Arms," and continuing along the back of the hovels in Bierton, as far as " the milestone," dates from this execution, and was made in order to avoid passing the gibbet, and also a temporary carriage-road was made along the same track : the latter was likely to have occasioned some serious inconvenience at the time of " the inclosure," which took place in 1779. The carriage-way was then finally closed, but the footpath still remains.

