

HISTORICAL MEMORANDA OF BIERTON.

In 1623 the Rev. Joseph Bird was presented to the Vicarage of Bierton, and in 1624 we meet with the entry of the baptism of his daughter Mary. The last and most touching entry respecting him is in 1662:—" Was buried December the 6th, the Rev. Joseph Bird, vicar of this parish, sequestered for the space of seventeen years for his loyalty and service to his sovereign Charles the First; was restored again 1660, at the coming in of his Majesty, that now is Charles the Second." From the incidental notices which occur in the register from time to time, it would seem that though sequestered he still remained in the village; and it is gratifying to find that among his parishioners there were those who deeply sympathised with him—for among the small bequests we find one of Mrs. Elizabeth Norton, the profits of which Mrs. Bird was to enjoy for life.

The extract above alluded to, carries us back to the year 1643; but it is evident that he manifested his loyalty and rendered service to his Sovereign Lord the King at an earlier period than this. We learn by the following extracts from the letters of Nehemiah Wharton, a subaltern officer in the Earl of Essex's army, that an opportunity presented itself for his doing so in 1642:—

" August 17th.—Our companies after they had taken sixe delinquents and sent them to London, returned to Aylesbury; this day we retained two field pieces and two troops of horse, with other necessaries of warre.—Wednesday morning a Warwickshire minister, which the cavalliers had pillaged to the skin, gave us a sermon; afternoone our regiment marched into the field and skirmished.—Thursday morning another sermon was given us.—Afternoone our regiment marched into the field, but by reason of foul weather, were immediately dismissed."

We should here remark, that the date of this extract is at least five days before the King set up his standard, so

that the men who fell in this skirmish would be in all probability those of the Bucks Yeomanry Corps, called out by some patriotic and loyal Magistrate to preserve the peace, likely to be endangered by Hampden's proceedings. In this corps there were then, and for many years after, several of the wealthy inhabitants of Bierton, as shown in the Parish Register, and the head inn in the village at that time (but now a private house) bore the significant sign of the "Valiant Yeoman."

Of the written evidence concerning this field of strife, I rather seek than attempt to give any information; possibly "Lord Nugent's Life of Hampden," or the pamphlet, "Good and joyful news out of Buckinghamshire," might throw some additional light upon the period under consideration; but the very limited time at my own disposal prevents me consulting them; I must therefore confine myself to the unwritten evidence which the parish affords, consisting of arms, armour, bones, coins, clothing, and lands bearing particular names, which I can only account for on the supposition that on these spots deadly warfare has occurred.

I request you patiently to follow me along that muddy lane, nearly opposite to the Church of St. James, at Bierton. At the distance of about a dozen chains you will find it crossed by a branch of the old Icknield way; passing which, and going on to nearly the top of the lane, you will find on the N. W. side a meadow bearing the significant title of "Breach Meadow." I admit that, taken by itself, the name might not be of much consequence, and might only have reference to cultivation of the soil; but its importance, in an historical point of view, arises from its position with other fields, and from certain relics. Leaving this meadow in a south-westerly direction, we come to "The King's Furlong." Standing on this land, with your face towards Holman's bridge, we have in front "Goodson's," a field so called from the family of Goodson, whose name appears in the register of Bierton as early as the year 1621. On and near this plot of ground numerous relics were found in 1818, some of which are preserved by our Society. Among the remainder was a large number of human bones; these were collected together, under the direction of the late Lord Nugent, and interred in Hardwick Churchyard, near the tower, within

a stone chest raised on three courses of unhewn stone, which appear at one time to have been enclosed, and the space planted with yew trees; the chest is banded together with iron, and the top secured on with eight screws. On a marble slab, about twenty-eight inches long by twenty-two inches wide, is the following inscription:—

“ Within are deposited the bones of two-hundred and forty-seven persons which were discovered A. D. 1818, buried in a field adjoining to Holman’s bridge. From the history and appearance of the place where they were found, they are concluded to be the remains of those officers and men who perished in an engagement fought A. D. 1642, between the troops of Charles the First, under the command of Prince Rupert, and the garrison who held Aylesbury for the Parliament. Enemies, from their attachment to opposite leaders and to opposite standards in the sanguinary conflicts of that civil war, they were, together victims of its fury, united in one common slaughter. They were buried in one common grave, close to the spot where they had lately stood in arms against each other.

“ May the memory of the brave be respected, and may our country never again be called to take part in contests such as these which this tablet records.—Erected by the late Lord Nugent.”

Thus much for the scene in front; but our business is chiefly with that in the rear, which is now called “Old Orchard Piece,” where it was customary, up to within the last thirty years, to dig for gravel on that side of the field, towards “The King’s Furlong;” and here, as might be expected, if any action had taken place, relics would be found—and so they were from time to time from the beginning of the present century. My information chiefly relates to the last find, which was by West, about the year 1830, and consisted of three halberts, of which the only remaining one will be exhibited at the next Meeting of the Society. The extreme length is eight feet six inches; the head is thirty two and a half inches long, and fastened to the staff by four screws, two only of which remain; it weighs eight pounds eleven ounces, the sides are protected by strips of iron five-eighths of an inch wide, running the whole length, and secured to the staff by thirty-nine brass-headed nails on each side: a breast-plate was also

found, and bones of horses and men. On the skeleton of one man was part of his clothing, and on that clothing two large buttons, the under sides of which were of bright gilt, while the upper or concave side was surrounded by a rim a quarter of an inch in height, which had been filled up with horn or some other perishable material; the bones were those of men of large stature—doubtless picked men to guard an important point. These bones, after lying a few days for inspection, were re-interred by Esau Chapman, on the same spot where they were discovered, viz., on the fifth land from the hedge side towards “The King’s Furlong,” and about eighteen inches below the surface. All the spears that have been found within the memory of any person now living, were in as perfect a condition as the one now exhibited, and of the same make. The road having been turned, this part of the field has not been again disturbed.

West is also reported to have discovered numerous coins, and I have reason to believe that most of them found their way to the smelting-pot, as they were not spoken of until several years after, lest the Lord of the Manor might have put the law of treasure trove in force, and claimed them as his own. It is certain, after this find West’s circumstances materially improved.

Standing still on the same spot, but turning towards the Church, it might be supposed you would see the noble mansion of the family of the Bosses, of whom all that we now know is by the record contained in the Church, and by an annual gift to the poor; so entire a clearance has been made of the mansion, that I cannot discover any person able to give the slightest information as to the precise spot on which it stood; and the only reason I have for supposing that it stood here about is, that the Charity is paid out of the rent of this farm, and a few old trees which appear to be the remains of an orchard. There is a local tradition to the effect, “that during the civil wars a grievous outrage was committed upon a noble family in Bierton, because they were in the possession of a portrait of his Majesty King Charles the First, and refused to surrender it to the rebel soldiery!” That the Bosses’ family were living here at the time is certain, and if they be the family to whom the tradition refers, then we can easily account for the disappearance of the mansion:

possibly a reference to a tract entitled "A relation of the rare exployts of the London Soldiers and Gentlemen lately gone out of the City for the designs of the King and Parliament. Hen. Elsyng Cler. Parl: D. Com. Printed for William Smith, 1642, 4to." might add to our scanty stock of information.

If we again turn to the letters of Nehemiah Wharton, we shall find that Hampden chose to desecrate the sabbath by the first array of the Buckinghamshire Militia on that day.

"In this town (Aylesbury) a pulpit was built in the market-place, where we heard two worthy sermons. Every day our soldiers by stealth doe visit Papists' houses and constraine from them both meate and money. They gave them whole greate loaves and cheeses, which they triumphantly carry away on the point of their swords."

I would here observe, that when the Roundheads use the word "Papist," they do not refer to members of the Romish Church, but speak this in contempt of the Protestant Church of England.

Doubtless it was on this trying occasion that the Rev. Joseph Bird rendered that act of service and loyalty to his Sovereign Lord the King, intimated in the Register; and a reference to "Walker's Sufferings of the Clergy" might enable us to determine the nature of the service so rendered; but for the reason already specified I cannot furnish it on this occasion. Whatever it might be, it caused his sequestration. The following year he was superceded by Brion Emmot, during whose Incumbency the following entries occur in the Parish Register:—

"Given out of the Gifts Stock to Naboth Stepney, a minister in Sussex, 2s."

"John, the son of Alice Amosel, born the 5th of October, illegitimate, she having the 7th day of November made public confession before the congregation."

"1654.—William Stratfold, the son of Samuel Stratfold, of Broughton, and Margaret Hawkins, were both married on Monday, ye 8th of January, at Broughton, by Justice Hill, and Mr. Emmot, minister."

This is the only instance recorded of a marriage by a Justice of the Peace, and in a private house.

My notice of these scenes of conflict ends for the present in the hamlet of Broughton, where in a direct line for

North Marston we meet with fields bearing warlike names—"Callage," "Callage Corner," "Callage Meadow." According to Edward Coles, who compiled a Dictionary of old and obsolete words, in 1717, "Call" signifies bravery; if we connect this with "Thorost" or "Thorock," which by the same author denominates "Heaps," as the "Thorocks" are in the immediate vicinity to the Callege, I think we may infer that in the one a desperate effort was made, great feats of valour accomplished, and a multitude of the slain were buried in those heaps of the other, which the cultivation of the soil has now removed.

It has been objected to this theory that the names of fields are usually older than 200 years—granted; but the instances of fields changing their names in this parish are numerous. "Goodson's" has already been noticed; "Corbet's Piece" and "Gile Lane" are names not yet a century old, and will form the subject of another paper; and "Dockman" has been changed into "Idle Piece" within the present generation.

I would also remark, that the absence of nearly every object of known Archæological interest in this parish is to be accounted for by the fact, that during the time the Rev. Thomas Smith was Vicar of this parish, his son begged or bought up all he could find, and on removing, after his father's death, carried all away. I may, perhaps, on a future day be enabled to glean some information respecting other fields, called "The Rue," "Heeles," "Paradise," and "The Hâms."