

The following notes on Hanslope Church were made during 'renovation' works in the early years of the 20th century by Alfred Heneage Cocks.

Notes on Hanslope Church

If it were legitimate or even possible to classify the churches of this county according to architectural merit and other features of interest, Hanslope Church could hardly fail to take, by common consent, a high place. In the following notes, however, no attempt is made to do justice to its architecture, but solely to enshrine among the **RECORDS OF BUCKS** a few facts of interest in connection with it which have been rescued from oblivion by the praiseworthy care of our fellow-member of this Society, Mr. William Whitbread,

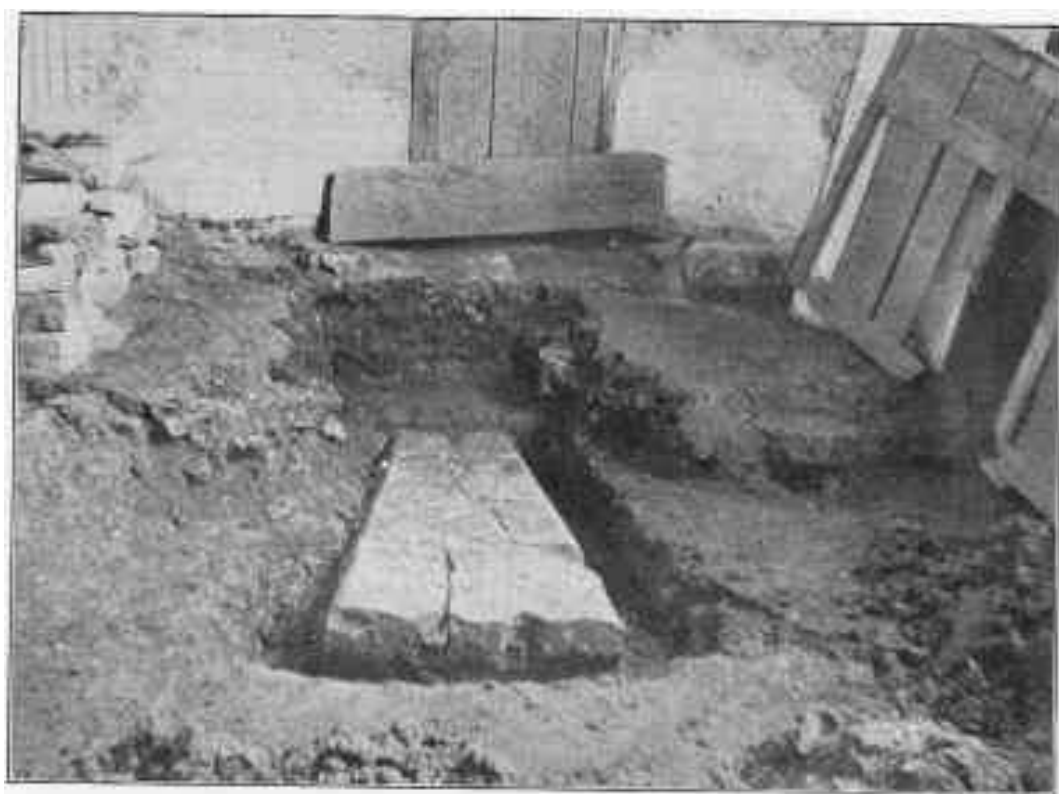


Plate 1: ANCIENT GRAVE-COVER IN SOUTH AISLE OF NAVE



Plate 2: TWO STONE COFFINS IN SOUTH AISLE OF NAVE

of that parish. At the same time these notes are for the most part of so profoundly melancholy a character that I am inclined to recommend anyone who dislikes stories that end badly, not to read them! With few exceptions they are records of the most ruthless and wanton destruction of various objects of mediaeval art, not in the "dark ages" of the 18th century, but in our own time, in the 20th century!

Throughout the greater part of the year 1905, this interesting church underwent "restoration," my friend Mr. J. O. Scott, F.S.A., being the architect, but naturally he was not constantly on the spot, and between his visits some of the local "authorities" seem to have perpetrated deeds which must fill all members of this Society with feelings of keen distress.

On April 6, 1905, at Mr. Whitbread's request, I visited the church,, and very much regret that owing to the length of the cross-country jounies my visit was of the briefest, and it was impossible to take the numerous notes one would have wished, and consequently I am indebted to Mr. Whitbread for most of the facts here set down.

Hanslope Church comprises chancel and N. aisle; nave and N. and S. aisles, with the so-called Troughton chapel eastwards of

the N. nave aisle, and between it and the chancel aisle, and a large W. End tower and spire, and two porches.

In the south wall of the S. (nave) aisle is an Early English cinquefoil-arched canopy surmounting a recess for a tomb. On removal of the floor of the church, two stone coffins were brought to light exactly in front of it, one being 1ft. 4in. from it, and the second coffin touching the north side of the first. There was no trace of either lid. The upper edges of the coffins were from 6 to 8in. below the old floor level. (The lower figure on the Plate.)

The south coffin (or that nearest the wall) contained two skeletons, but had been re-opened since the insertion of the second body, and had suffered a good deal of disturbance. A portion of one skeleton remained in position, as the body had been deposited; but it was impossible to say off-hand to which body many of the bones belonged, and a large majority of them were broken. The bones belonging to what we may suppose was the original occupier of the coffin were entirely displaced; the calvarium, which was large, was completely broken, and was lying towards the right side of the waist of the second body, the mamillaries being found separately. The skeleton was that of an elderly person, and was much decayed. A lower maxilla, which apparently belonged to this body, had nearly all the alveoli closed, showing the teeth had been lost a considerable time before death; it was $1\frac{1}{16}$ in. high at the symphysis, and the chin was somewhat prominent. Five or six of the lower dorsal and upper lumbar vertebrae were ankylosed by exostosis, so as to be perfectly rigid, a condition which Dr. Baker informs me is not uncommon in severe cases of rheumatoid arthritis. Only one humerus in the coffin admitted of measurement, and apparently belonged to this skeleton: it was a thin bone 14.1in. long, which would show an approximate stature* of 5ft. 10in. or a fraction more.

Of the second skeleton in this coffin, the skull was somewhat narrow anteriorly, and rather markedly so posteriorly; the upper incisor teeth were all absent; the other teeth showed considerable wear. The lower mandible was $1\frac{1}{2}$ in. high at the symphysis. The probable age was about 45 to 50 years. There was only one femur in the coffin that could be measured; it probably belonged to this skeleton, and was 1ft. 5in. in extreme length, which would give an approximate stature* of barely 5ft. 2in. With regard to the sex of these two skeletons, my examination was so cursory (owing to the very short time at my disposal) that I hardly like to suggest an opinion, since even experts cannot always decide without com-

plete *data*. The apparently large size of the broken calvarium, and the long¹ humerus of the older skeleton, would point to the male sex, while the slender character of the latter bone, and the slight height of the lower mandible, suggest either a female, or a man of less than normal muscular development. The second, more perfect skull had the appearance of that of a man, and the higher lower mandible agrees with this supposition, but the short stature as indicated by the femur (though of course not incompatible with the male theory) is at least suggestive of a female. The only pair of innominate bones in the coffin seemed, to a hasty inspection, to indicate this latter sex, but whether that was so or not, they may have belonged to either skeleton, though the later one is the more likely.

It is impossible to state positively the early history of this coffin and its two occupants; but the following seems a very plausible theory. It may be accepted as almost certain that the rheumatic, delicate, elderly person was the original occupant of the coffin, in the early part of the 13th century; and it seems most likely that he was of the male sex. That after an interval of time sufficient for the entire decay of the muscles and ligaments, a near relation of his died (such as a wife a good deal younger than himself, or a son); that the old man's bones were taken out of the coffin, and the second corpse inserted in their place, and that the bones were then replaced in the coffin, without regard to their natural order, wherever they could be packed in, on the corpse. The disturbance previously alluded to no doubt took place at a much later period, possibly at the restoration of the church after the fire which occurred probably early in the 17th century, and the lids may have been removed at the same time.

A shell of *Planorbis* (? *sp.*) lay at the bottom of this coffin, and both the coffins were filled in with soil (clay with numerous stones).

The second coffin (that furthest from the wall) had a piece over a foot in width broken out of the left side just below the position of the knees of the contained body. Here again the bones had been completely disturbed, and what remained of them were nearly all in an imperfect condition. The greater part of the broken skull had been removed and buried before my arrival, and the fragments remaining were too small to show anything except that the skull had been of medium thickness. There were two fragments of the superior maxillary, one from the left side contained the first molar * *British Barrows*, by Canon Greenwell, p. 564; "Description of Figures of Skulls," by Professor Rolleston.

and the two premolar teeth; the first premolar was not worn at all, the second was moderately worn, and the molar more so. The other fragment, from the right side, contained only the first molar, which was moderately worn. The deceased was probably of about "middle age," or say between 40 and 50, but this is surmised, not proved. One femur was perfect, and measured $18\frac{1}{4}$ in. in extreme length, which gives an approximate stature of about 5ft. 6in.

Among the *debris* in this coffin was a Lombardic capital letter C in brass or latten. It measures 2in. in length, with a flat surface, and was no doubt a unit in a monumental inscription, counter-sunk into a marble matrix, about a quarter through the 14th century. An early Lombardic C is distinguished from a D (if reversed), by the ends of the curved portion or horns, being turned inwards; while in the latter letter they turn outwards. Tolerably early in the 14th century, however, alphabets began to be formed in which the horns of the C were reduced to quite short, tapering snags; and in the Hanslope letter these ends are quite short, but while the under surface of the whole of the rest of the letter is undercut or bevelled off, the more easily to countersink it in the matrix, these horns do not taper, but finish square, with rough unbevelled ends, suggestive of the terminal knobs having been cut off a D to allow of its doing duty as a C. This coffin contained an iron coffin nail, probably of the 18th, or 17th century.

In excavating the chancel floor, an oak dug-out coffin had been encountered under the raised floor of the sanctuary; the projecting portion had been accordingly sawed off! This, although it must have been the head end, was only 1ft. lin. wide outside.

Near the E. door of the S. aisle of the nave, and about 1ft. below floor level, was the cover of a grave, 5ft. $5\frac{3}{4}$ in. long, composed of eight rough stone slabs, placed in pairs from W. to E., chamfered round the outer edge except at head end, which was left quite rough. The stones were roughly chiselled flat, but were entirely untrimmed on the inner edges, so that there were in places wide spaces between them. There were no stones forming sides to the grave, but 3ft. lower we found a femur, which is likely to have belonged to the person for whom this grave-cover was constructed. My time did not permit of a systematic search, but probably most of the bones had perished. A bar pushed down a foot further through the wet clay, struck (at 5ft. below floor level) against a hollow-sounding stone, which may or may not have been the paved bottom of the grave. Somewhat similar grave-covers were found in Hitcham Churchyard in 1873 and previously, except that in those the lid slabs (of chalk) ran through from side to side, and rested on other

slabs placed upright to form sides and ends to the graves, and there were no stones at bottom.* (See Plate 1.)

Mr. Whitbread has kindly supplied the following particulars about the coffins:— The first-mentioned (or southern) one, was 6ft. 5in. long outside, 2ft. 1¹/₄in. wide at the head end, and 1ft. 2in. at the foot. There is a curved recess for the head, occupying very nearly the entire width of the coffin. A square drainage hole is cut about the centre of the bottom, diminishing to a small circular hole exteriorly; and a second, circular hole about half-way between the first and the foot of the coffin, diminishing to a much smaller circular hole externally.

The second (or N.) coffin measures 6ft. 8 ¹/₂in. in extreme length, 2ft. 2in. wide at head, 1ft. 2¹/₂in. at foot. There is a curved recess for the head, somewhat rounder than in the first — that is, rather more of the matrix is left on either side. Some way below the centre of the bottom, about where the knees of the body come, is a round drainage hole, with curved channels or grooves (in horse-shoe form) a few inches long, leading to it from lower down. About abreast comes the fracture in the left side, already mentioned. In the head end, exteriorly, are fixed two pieces of iron, the purpose of which is not obvious, though several theoretical explanations suggest themselves. The depth interiorly at the sides is 11in., but the bottom is convex, so that along the centre it is only 10in. The first coffin has a similar convexity of bottom, but I do not know the actual measurements.

In the splay below the window in S. wall of nave aisle, a little way east of the canopy, were found portions of two stone coffin lids, the larger fragment 4ft. 7¹/₂in. long, bearing what appears, to be a cross patee with the periphery rounded, and with an ornamental stem. The smaller fragment measures 1ft. 11¹/₂in., and is plain.

Since the date of my visit, the stone coffins have both been removed from their ancient and original position, and placed in the N. aisle, "after having their inner surface carefully chiselled off, and a(?) nice chamfer cut on their inner edge " !!

The following are also reported by Mr. Whitbread with regret,, which must be shared by every reader of the **RECORDS** :—

On the splay of E. window of south aisle was found a series of three paintings, one probably 15th century, and two 17th, of rich, colour and beautiful design. These have been hacked off.

Over the chancel arch were traces of a picture. This was on splendid plaster, and might well have been uncovered: but it was hacked off.

* *Records of Bucks*, volume 4, page 186.

There are still traces of painting above the entrance to the rood loft. Just under the sill of this doorway is a painting of a bear with ragged staff, the crest of the Earls of Warwick. The bear is unmuzzled.

On the north side of the chancel arch there was a cross fleurette (?) in blue on what was probably white ground; this has been obliterated, but Mr. Whitbread fortunately secured a tracing of the last portion before it also was wantonly destroyed.

On the N. wall of the north aisle, over the sepulchral arch, a large painting was partially uncovered, angels and other figures could be traced, and a Figure seated high above the others. Hacked off.

There was scarcely a yard out of the entire surface of that wall that had not been coloured and decorated. To the west of this; arch, and between it and the door, Mr. Whitbread opened out an Early English Holy Water stoup.

The east end and part of the N. wall were rebuilt at an early date; and five of the masks from the Norman cornice appear to have been inserted a little later, over two of the windows of the nave. Two others were found some years since and preserved in the church; they have now been replaced in the corbel table above the arch from chancel into a side chapel. One stone of a circular column was exposed in the east wall of this chapel; it was removed and placed on a projecting angle near the above corbel table.

The lid of a stone coffin was found under the floor in the north aisle, and was placed under the sepulchral canopy in front of which it was found. This has now been smashed up.

Under the floor of the S. aisle two stones were found, one almost complete, and of the other about three-quarters remained. They were of local limestone measuring 15in. square, and 3¹/₂in. thick at the sides, but their upper surface concave from end to end. Mr. Whitbread queries whether they could have been pillow stones, mentioning that there are several square slabs of stone each bearing a cross carved on it, in Kingsthorp Church, Northamptonshire, which have been so considered. The Hanslope stones are now either broken up or used as building material.

The easternmost column on the S. side of the nave arcade had on the nave (*i.e.* N.) side below the capital, a projection extending about 3ft. 6in. downwards. This has now been "carefully" worked off to match the other pillars. It suggested a bracket and canopy.

The old font (which Mr. Whitbread thinks was 17th century), was worked up to form a pedestal for the Georgian oak pulpit, the original pedestal of which was done away with.

In the S. aisle Mr. Whitbread opened out an E.E. piscina, some putlog holes going right through the walls, and some corbel holes on each side of the east window of this aisle.

Under the modern floor a thick layer of ashes, charcoal, etc., remained from the fire of about three centuries ago. There were many fragments of tiles; and (besides the brass letter already mentioned) the following small objects collected by Mr. Whitbread, have been very kindly presented by him to the County Museum :—

Two oyster shells, one of which has contained red paint, and the other gold; found immediately under the canopied tomb in the S. aisle, over which there was a large wall painting (now destroyed); and it seems evident that oyster shells were used as palates, one- for each colour. In the same aisle were found a (?) bronze coin, c. 19 mm. diameter; Obv. full-face crowned head, wavy hair, shoulders not shown, inscribed in Lombardic capitals — **EDWARDUS REX ANGLI**. Rev.: attenuated cross patee reaching nearly to edge, 3 pellets in each quarter, **CIVITAS LONDON**. Apparently Edward III. (from the name being in full, and the bust cut short so as to exclude the shoulders. And a mite(?) of Charles I., c. 17 mm. diameter. Obv. crown and crossed sceptres, **CAR. D. G. MAG. BRI**. Rev.: crowned harp, **FR [ET] HIB REX**.

The disc-shaped lip or rim of a very small glass vase or cruet (?). Flat, $1\frac{1}{16}$ in. diameter, central opening $\frac{1}{4}$ in. diameter. On the under side are the rough edges whence the neck was broken. It was in the soil in one of the stone coffins.

An iron hoe-like implement, $4\frac{1}{2}$ in. wide, $1\frac{3}{4}$ in. high, with a tang about $2\frac{1}{4}$ in. long, was found in the east wall of N. chapel; the wall was very loosely built, and full of what appeared to be soot. No flue or fire-place could be traced, and it seems possible this was merely the result of the fire several times mentioned already.

One of the bells cast by Robert Atton at Buckingham in the 17th century has been melted.

A. H. COCKS.