

Notes on a Roman Burial Place discovered at Northstoke, in December, 1887.

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FIRST, as to its position, and the local circumstances of it. Secondly, as to the remains examined by Dr. John Beddoe, M.D., F.R.S.

The portion of the Via Julia,¹ or Augusta Way, which passes from Bath westward, through Weston, Kelston, and Northstoke, follows, as we believe, a British trackway. Not far from the present rectory house at Northstoke, the track seems to have branched in several directions. Upon one of them the Roman road continued to be laid, till it reached the Trajectus at Bitton; and over part of this, as you approach Bitton, the present high-road to Bristol passes. Another branch took its course over the higher ground above the Avon in a north-westerly direction, and is a track which I have felt deserves further investigation than it has hitherto received, as being a more direct continuance of the main track (the one towards Bitton itself deflects considerably). A third branch leads to the high down-land and hill promontory, known in the district as the Peak of Derby. The fourth branch, which led out of the main trackway northward, starts from a point nearer to the present rectory, than the divergence of the other roads, by about 150 yards. This branch, in a widened and macadamised condition, now constitutes the village street of Northstoke. It is the way to the church; from it you

(1). It appears to have obtained the name Via Julia through Bertram's false work, imputed to Richard of Cirencester. (See Mr. Wm. George's tractate hereon.)

ascend by flights of steps into the churchyard, and just at this point of its course there is a piece of roadside waste, on which is the supposed site of the Roman Villa at Northstoke, mentioned in the *Aqua Sulis* of Scarth. Its position, however, in that work, is not more exactly defined than by the words "between the church and the village." Onward, above the church, towards the north-west end of the plateau of Lansdown, called "The Little Down," this ancient road pursues its course; at first it is bounded by hedges; afterwards, as it ascends the Down, it is unenclosed and narrow. Now, upon the right hand as you ascend, or eastern side of this road, at a distance of about a quarter of a mile above the church, is the site of the burial place, to which these notes refer.

There are some British earth-works (*i.e.*, a strong vallum and deep foss) drawn conformably to the end of the hill, standing above, and almost overhanging the site of the interments. If you were to shoot an arrow from the north end of the vallum towards the west, with power to travel 100 yards, it would probably fall on the burial ground, and a few paces from the line of the road. The Romans held these works, together with rectangular camps of their own making, all on the same plateau, which is well known as the annual scene of the Bath races. I do not think the burial place was approached for interment purposes directly down the end of the hill (as the descent is very steep), but that the dead would be carried round from the back of the plateau by this roadway. It commands an extensive view to the westward; and if any memorials were ever erected there for the dead, they would be seen by all who passed that way from the Severn and Avon to the camps on Lansdown and adjoining stations in the direction of Dyrham and Sodbury. Up to the present time the remains of three bodies have been exhumed by men engaged in quarrying. Two of the skeletons lay uncoffined; the third was deposited in a strong sarcophagus of local oolite.

All of them were interred with direction from head to foot N.N.W. to S.S.E. There is a low ridge in the ground here, but not of tumulus form. In this the dead lay very superficially interred. The stones which the quarry-men were seeking had not been disturbed, but formed a bed for the dead to rest on, covered with a foot or so of light soil. This roll of earth was probably caused by detritus from the hill above, and not raised by the hand of man. The uncoffined skeletons (which were the first found) sustained rough treatment, unfortunately, and were broken to pieces. Not so the coffined one, which the tenant of the land, Mr. Gibbs, of Church Farm, carefully preserved from the first, and removed to a secure building near his own house. The remains have been examined by Dr. Beddoe, who kindly adds his scientific report on them to this description of mine. It now only remains for me to say that the sarcophagus measured 6 feet 6 inches from end to end outside; that it was 3 inches thick at the head, and 4 at the foot; that it was therefore 5 feet 11 inches long inside. That it had in breadth at the rounded shoulder or widest part of it 18 inches on the inside; had depth 11 inches; and breadth at foot 8 inches; was roughly chiselled externally, and resembled others found at Langridge and in the Bath district at different times. The lid was originally in three pieces, and through the joints soil had infiltrated.

The operations of quarrying have ceased for a time, so it cannot be said to what extent burials took place here. The soil which overlay the skeleton within the sarcophagus has been removed, little by little, and searched for any objects of interest, but it has yielded none. A few small nails, turned up at their points (*e.g.*, J), have been found; which, as they lay near *the feet* of the Roman, may have fastened some portion of the sandals in which he was buried some 1,500 years ago.
