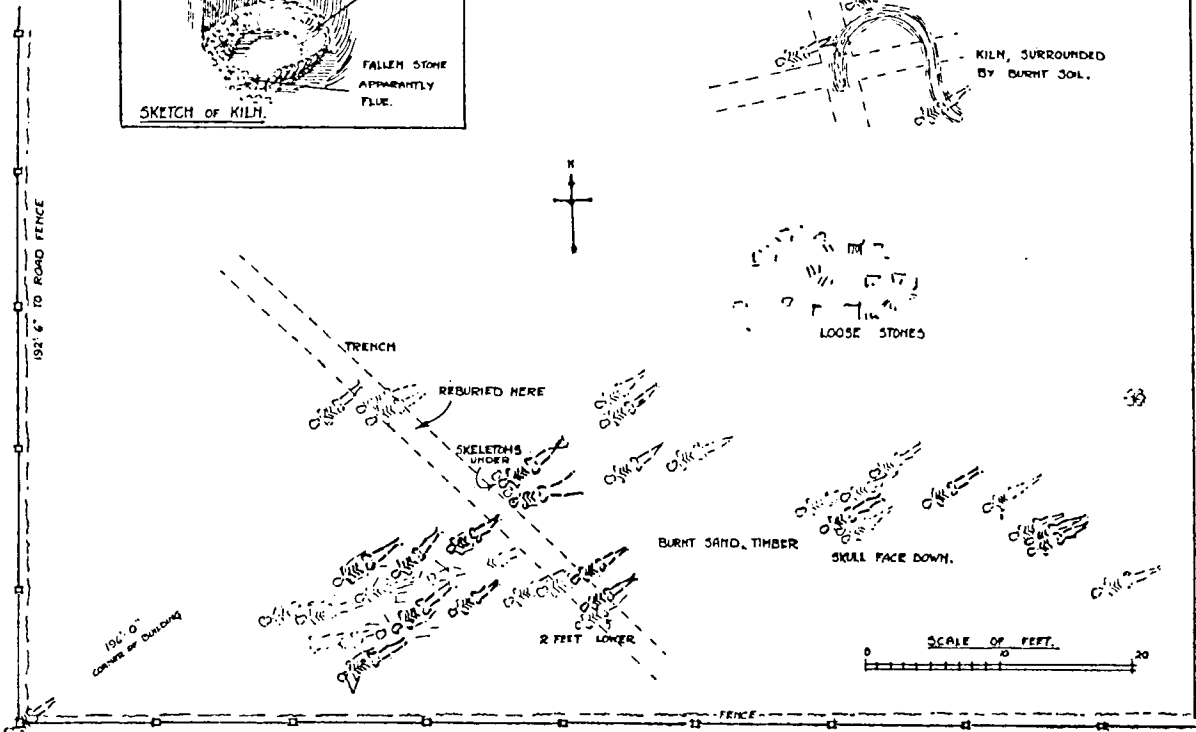
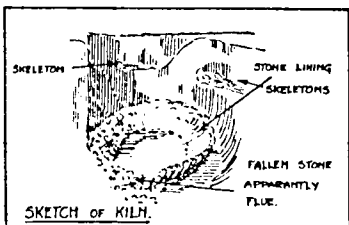


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Excavations at 'Chapel Haye,' Churchdown

by R. W. Murray
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CHAPEL HAYE.

PLAN - MARCH 1924.

EXCAVATIONS AT "CHAPEL HAYE,"
CHURCHDOWN.

January-March, 1924.

By R. W. MURRAY, F.R.C.S.

(With Plan).

[The following report has been kindly prepared by our member, Dr. R. W. Murray, who watched the excavations very closely in conjunction with Mr. L. W. Barnard, F.R.I.B.A., secretary of the Excavations Committee. Mr. Barnard also prepared the plan which accompanies the report. A grant from the Excavation Fund has been made to meet the cost of the labour employed and for further investigation. The thanks of the Society are due to the Chairman and the Committee of the Churchdown United Service Club for permitting access to the ground and for giving every facility for observation.]

THE late Rev. Dr. Frederick Smithe, formerly Vicar of Churchdown, in concluding a detailed account of the Church of St. Bartholomew, says:—

“ In front of the glebe house, which is about quarter of a mile up Chosen Hill, is a broad meadow sloping toward the road, which skirts the Manor, or “ Great House.” The field is known as “ Chapel Haye,” and the belief amongst the aged villagers is that a chapel existed there years ago. Human bones, they say, have been dug up on this spot. Certain it is, that at sunset, when the slanting rays deepen the shadows, and show the irregularity of the ground, the traces of some outlines of a building are pretty visible.¹

¹ *Transactions*, xiii, 271-87.

No chapel here seems to be mentioned in records or county histories, still, an ancient Chapel must have existed to originate the place-name of Chapel Haye; this building too, would have been in charge of the Canons of St. Oswald's."

Chapel Haye is a sloping field of about six acres, and rectangular in shape. St Andrew's Church, erected in 1904, stands at the N.W. corner, and the United Service Club-House and grounds at the N.E. corner. The grounds of the Vicarage form the southern boundary; two roads limit the N. and W. sides. There is no record of any human remains or of any evidence of ancient building material having been found when the foundations of St. Andrew's Church were laid, but when the United Service Club-House was built in 1920 a few human remains were uncovered, and a Roman coin bearing the inscription of Constantine I was found.

The United Service Club recently acquired a further portion of Chapel Haye for additional tennis courts and to enlarge the bowling green. When on 26 January, 1924, the S.W. corner post was sunk to enclose this ground some human bones were found at a depth of about two feet, and shortly afterwards, during digging operations in order to level the sloping ground, fragments of human remains were found scattered amongst a quantity of rough stones. These broken bones consisted of portions of the skull, lower jaw, upper and lower limbs of children and adults, one to one and a half feet from the surface, and without any evidence of orderly burial. Fragments of tiles, pottery and a few pieces of worked stone were also found scattered amongst stones and lime.

Owing to the slope of the ground and as the digging proceeded towards the south the soil was exposed to a greater depth, and a considerable quantity of building stones, much larger stones than any found hitherto, had to be removed. These stones were for the most part lying piled

irregularly one on top of another in a row, six yards long s.w. by n.e., and on either side of them was a smaller heap of similar stones. From the irregular manner in which they were found to be lying, it was obvious that they had been removed from elsewhere to their present position. The lowest level of these stones was from two to three feet from the surface.

The first definite evidence of burials was seen at the s.w. corner of the enclosed ground close to where human remains were found when the corner post was sunk. Numerous skeletons were uncovered here, all with their heads w. and feet e. lying in four or five parallel rows and at the same general level. It was found subsequently that there were two or three tiers of these skeletons, six inches to one foot of earth separating each over-lying layer. The superficial layer was two feet from the surface. In most cases one skeleton over-lapped another in the same line, the feet reaching to the level of the other's shoulder. With the exception of the ribs and some of the small bones of the extremities the skeletons were intact. Only four or five rows were exposed, but had the soil been removed further s., beyond the limits of the enclosed ground, it is probable that a continuation of these superficial burials would have been disclosed.

No children were buried at this spot; no coffin nails, coins, or funeral furniture were found. These burials were so superficial, so numerous, the bodies lying so close together and in such orderly fashion, that it was clearly a case of collective, as distinct from individual, burial, due very likely to numerous deaths occurring at or about the same time. This was the opinion of all those who had the opportunity of seeing the skeletons when exposed.

Attention now being directed to burials, the part of the ground already levelled was examined. Two yards directly s. of the e. end of the row of building stones already mentioned, a skeleton in a sitting position, facing

N. with the knees extended, was found. Several trenches were made, and many other skeletons were found three or four feet deep all oriented E. and W.

Each skeleton found at these deeper levels was, as a rule, separated from the adjacent one by an appreciable distance. It was clear that they had been buried separately. This part of the field had obviously been an ancient burial ground. The skeletons found in parallel rows at the S.W. corner had evidently been buried at a later date than those which had been buried more deeply. The absence of coffin nails and funeral furniture in both the deep and the superficial burials points to the probability of this part of the grave-yard being the poor man's quarter, and this view receives some support from the fact that the collective burials took place in this part of the Church-yard.

During the levelling of the ground at the spot marked in the diagram, the earth was noticed to be of a brick-red colour, suggesting that a fire had been there. On exploring with an iron probe no foundation could be detected, but further digging at this spot showed that the red discolouration of the soil extended downwards and increased slightly in area. On removing the soil for a width of about twelve feet, part of a kiln, roughly circular in shape, six feet in diameter, with a flue at the E. side, was found at a depth of some six feet from the original surface level. Some weeks later a considerable quantity of iron-stone dross was found, when the sloping ground was levelled to enlarge the bowling green. One of the largest pieces weighed 12 pounds.

So much for the general description. The finds will now be described in greater detail.

The large building stones were all local stone and very roughly shaped, one of the largest measured 2 ft. by 2 ft. by 16 ins. When they were all collected together they formed a mass 30 ft. long, 4 ft. wide, and 2 ft. 9 ins. high;

sufficient material to form one half the foundations of a small church or chapel. Some had mortar attached to them. As already stated, there was no evidence at all that these stones had formed part of a building on the site where they were found. They were heaped irregularly one upon another and had clearly been "dumped" there, probably from some adjacent site. They must have been used as foundation stones, for when removed from the earth they were in good condition, but several of them cracked a few weeks after exposure to wind and frost.

One piece of worked stone is of considerable interest. It was not found amongst the large stones but to the north of them, buried two feet deep. The decorative work, and the general geometrical formation would suggest the possibility of it being Gothic, probably 14th century. Another small fragment of moulded stone is also probably 14th century.

Many pieces of stone roof-tiling were found, the largest measuring 15 by 10 inches. Judging from the size and shape of the hole in the stone roof tiles, the majority of them had been fixed by wooden pins and not by nails. Several broken pieces of red tiles, undoubtedly Romano-British, were found, also fragments of pottery, such as were frequently used for cinerary urns, and numerous pieces of rough stone-coloured pottery, all of which are certainly post-Norman.

Pieces of metal, such as blades of knives, nails (one of which might possibly be a door nail), one piece of worked metal, which might be part of a lock, and another piece of worked metal, were found.

HUMAN REMAINS.

These consisted chiefly of the skeletons of adults, men and women. Fragments of the bones of children and young persons were seen scattered amongst the earth and stones within two feet of the surface. No complete

burial of a child or young person was found. Almost without exception, all the bodies were lying E. and W. That several of the bodies were those of women could, with some degree of accuracy, be determined by the height of the individual, the breadth of the pelvis in proportion to the height, the thickness of the long bones, and the small size of the bony ridges and depressions for muscular attachments. The length of the skeletons varied from five feet ten inches, to five feet four inches. One of the striking features was the excellent teeth these people had. Amongst the adults the molar teeth were worn flat, but there was little or no evidence of dental decay. Another and very important fact was that when the jaws were closed the opposing front teeth met one another and did not overlap as our front teeth do when we bite. This meeting of the front teeth is characteristic of an earlier or more primitive type of man. Several of the skulls, together with some of the long bones, were sent to Sir Arthur Keith, at the Royal College of Surgeons, London, who wrote: "They are typical Saxon skulls, I would rather say British, for they are probably nearer the fourteenth than the eleventh century."

The skeletons found were probably burials of late thirteenth, and early fourteenth century, and still presented the main characteristics of the Saxon type. Further investigations are to be carried out in an adjoining part of Chapel Hays, which it is hoped may result in more definite evidence as to date and to the existence of a chapel.

THE KILN.

The base of the kiln was about seven and a half feet from the surface level. The portions of the wall remaining were from 2 ft. to $1\frac{1}{2}$ ft. in height and 6 inches thick, forming a rough circle nearly six feet in diameter composed of burnt lime and small irregular shaped stones. Some

pieces of charcoal oak (*quercus robur*) kindly identified by Mr. A. H. Lyell, F.S.A., were seen inside the kiln, at the junction of the wall and the base. Some 6 inches of burnt stone and lime rested on the true base of the kiln. At the south-east side was what appeared to be the flue. It was 6 ft. in length, 2 ft. 6 inches wide, and 2 feet deep. At the far end of the flue were stones arranged in step-like formation. The wall of the flue was wanting for about 3 ft. on the south side, not far from the flue, and this point probably corresponded to the stoke-hole. The kiln had been built in the ground and was bottle shaped, the chimney, or neck of the bottle, being above the surface level.

The surrounding soil from the base of the kiln to the surface of the ground was coloured red for a depth of 2 to 3 feet, with the exception of the flue level, and the discolouration was not very marked at the level where the stoke-hole probably was. It was, in fact, this difference in the colour of the soil which gave an indication as to where the flue was before it was actually exposed.

Two skeletons were found near the kiln, the feet of one resting where part of the kiln had stood. The bones were not charred and it was clear that burial had taken place long after the kiln had been demolished.

It has not been established what the kiln was used for. Unfortunately all the dome, and nearly all the wall had been demolished. The numerous pieces of burnt stone and lime found within 2 ft. of the surface level in the adjacent soil almost certainly once formed part of the kiln. Whatever its use was, the heat must have been intense to produce discolouration of the earth for such a depth surrounding it. It is difficult to draw any definite conclusions from its probable shape and structure, and the same difficulty occurs regarding the miscellaneous articles found near the surface level. The fact that so many pieces of broken pottery were found within 2 ft. of the

surface not far from where the kiln stood would suggest that it might have been a pottery kiln, but on the other hand it must be remembered that burials had taken place over the kiln, probably many years after it had been demolished, and the pieces of pottery had most likely been deposited there at a still later date.

A considerable quantity of burnt lime and stone was found near the surface, but this almost certainly formed part of the walls and dome. There was not sufficient quantity of lime scattered through the soil to prove that it had been a lime-kiln. At the same time we know that lime-kilns and brick-kilns existed in the neighbourhood. That it had been a brick-kiln, there is no evidence one way or the other. The finding of a considerable quantity of iron-stone dross near the surface, some ten yards from the kiln, is interesting, and difficult to account for, but had the kiln been used for smelting iron, some metal would surely have been found at the base of the kiln. This was always the case in the old smelting kilns in the Forest of Dean. On the other hand, how can one account for the presence of the smelted iron dross, one piece of which weighed 12 pounds.

It is unfortunate that the excavations were made under circumstances which prevented leisurely examination, for with sufficient time more definite conclusions might have been formed. The kiln is now covered in sandy soil, but its position has been noted carefully, in case an opportunity occurs for re-investigation.