

a
walk round
Kidderminster:

with
NOTES

BY THE WAY

.....

PHILOLOGIC and PHILOSOPHIC,

By Geo. E. Roberts.

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without the world so wide;
An Island rich - that hath small need
Of all the world beside.

Gerald Mercator
1636

SEPT.

1853

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A Transcription

A walk round Kidderminster with notes by the way.

Taken in y^e year 1853, by mee. Geo: Edw: Roberts

The early history of the Town cannot boast of many passages of importance, though a place of considerable antiquity: we find it noted as a manufacturing Town in the days of Edw. III, and then sending a member to the Parliament assembled at Oxford. Wars, and even rumours of wars seem scarcely to have reached it, for though Chas I marched his army through on their way to Worcester, - and the victorious enemy took it en route to Bridgenorth, we find no trace of their visit. (See Note 1. at end)

But we shall find it worthy of notice, to trace the various modifications of orthography the name itself has gone through. In the seventeenth Century it was known as Kederminster, Baxter thus writes it in "The Bayliffe's Booke" [AD 1650 (see Note 2)], and this is followed by Leland in his "Itinerary" [AD 1540]. Diving down to "the good old times" of Saxon rule we find in the 'Worcester Register' "Kynbert-minster" and "Cynberminster" and at last reach the fountain head of its travels in an historical fragment running thus. -

"Cynebert the Earl received from Ethelbert, ten cassets of land near the wood Kinbere, here he built a monastic church, calling it after himself Cynebertminster". [C. Nash's Worcester.] In process of time its founder dyed, and the church having formed the nucleus of a small hamlet, was known as Kinberminster, from its vicinity to the wood Kinbere. [D. Worcester Register – Nash.]

Now this wood, though long vanished, gave its name to the tract of land it covered, which we now familiarly know as "Kinver". (See note 3)

So far touching our etymological antiquities.

Very little does the Town afford interesting to the Archaeologist. Caldwell, the seat of Baxter's opponent, Sir Ralph de Clare, exists but as a mutilated shadow of its former self, forming part of a private residence. (see note 4)

The house of Baxter has likewise disappeared, though only in 1849 did it cease to be among us. It stood in High St. on the spot now occupied by Mr. David Baker. (see note 5)

(Transcriber's note: Note 5 is missing. Drainage Maps, dated in the 1850's, to be found in Kidderminster Library, show that David Baker occupied the position usually associated with Richard Baxter i.e. second building up from the old Guildhall. See also Appendix 1)

The Town never having possessed a Local Historian is a great drawback to the labours of an Antiquary, as no verifying proof can he give for any remarkable mythe related to him. We have numerous legends touching subterranean passages extending beneath the Town from the Church of St Mary to Caldwell: reports are often arising that the main passage has been struck upon while sinking a foundation, and innumerable smaller ramifications are supposed to exist. (See Note 6)

Nearly every place of note in the neighbourhood is invested with a mythic embellishment, in which the Devil, and a certain apocryphal personage Known as " King Keder" figure the most conspicuously. [F. See Allie's Worcestershire (1852) & Pierce's Kidderminster (1842)]

The greatest number of objects of interest being found in the surrounding country, we will take an imaginary ramble to a few of the chief points, and search out all visible wonders.

Our first halting place shall be Habberley. On our way thither we pass a part of the town yclep'd Cussfield, a legend is attached to this spot, which is , briefly, as follows –

When the Parish Church was in erection, the stones etc. employed in building, were miraculously transported in the night from the Church-hill to the ground we stand on:- this being attributed to Satanic agency, the then Bp. of Worcester solemnly cursed the ground that the devil had chosen in preference to the already sanctified portion; the anathemized land from that took its present name, Curstfield, or Cussfield.

So saith the Legend, which, by the bye is a very generally met with one, therefore cannot be considered strictly local. [See many similar in "Notes & Queries" Vol VI passim.] [*see Appendix 2*]

Habberley is situated about a mile from the Town to the N:W: The derivation of the word clearly shows the character of the place. Aber (Br.) a valley, and **ley** (Sax) a pasture. As a picture of English Scenery it is perfect, woods and rocks uniting in happy disorder lie stretched before the eye, while the purple heather, and the golden gorse fill up the intervening space with brightness and beauty.

The most favourable point to view it, is obtained from a rock at the head of the Valley, and here we will seat ourselves.

Before us lies the "Giants Grave" touching which, we in our schoolboy days, took in with confiding simplicity the legend it is invested with: – how the Giant "Fin" returning from a carouse at Trimpley, and being dazzled by the lights at Boddington, fell over the precipice we are now seated on, and was buried "with the honours" on the spot that received him, for report doth say, he was too weighty to be moved. With what reverence did we regard the mighty grave, - but alas! for our belief in the wonder, subsequent research brought to light rock as forming the major part of its internal structure – and thus annihilated at a blow, its claims to an artificial erection. It was wonderful how it fell in our estimation, immediately after the discovery, -- but "c'est toujours ainsi".

This is evidently a celtic legend, Fin, or rather Fihn invariably plays the first part in Ersean Myths as "Fihn-ma-ghoul", "Fihn ma crou" etc. –

We may trace them all to Norsean Mythology, which is, pre-eminently, the home of the Giants.

In botanical rarities this locality is not rich, in fact, nothing worthy of a note can be gleaned from it, if we except the brilliant Parrakeet Fungi which occur in great variety and beauty.

It is a matter of astonishment that the maiden-hair Fern does not grow in the crevices of the rocks, but so it is, not even the "A. ruta-mararia", the most generally met with of the tribe being found here. (see note 7)

School-day associations connected with the Valley are legion in number, – what savoury meats the "old woman" on the bank was wont to turn out for our private discussion, there never were such tarts, we thought,, and then the cheesecakes – they were too overwhelming, we were ready to exclaim, with the Ecclesiast of old "Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all"!

Their glory is departed, – for the contemplation of them does not give that sence of perfection it once did. Heigho! perhaps it is we who are changed after all.

Those wooded heights to the right are Wassail a nearly pure Saxon word, by the way, from **paer-hael** (ie. waes-hael) all health, or be of health: [or drink health. So used in the legendary anecdote of Vortigen & Rowena. see Hume and Macaulay.] so that it may have figured as a meeting place between some petty Saxon Kings, at which their differences being adjusted, a feast followed, and the hill named from the convivial pledgings that ensued.

There are the remains of two encampments upon the hill, one evidently Danish, the other, one of a line of camps stretching from Kinver Edge to Arley Wood, made by Henry IV when he pursued Owen Glendwr A.D. 1402. The wood is too thick to allow them to be distinguished except on a very close inspection. Underneath Wassail is the smaller wood of Habberley, full of picturesque beauty, on one of the naked Firs at the entrance, a Bellman some years ago hung himself, and in conformity with the then existant law, he was buried in the cross roads near Shatterford. The spot of his interment is still known as "Bellman's Cross" and the tree on which he was suspended remains the plague-spot of the landscape, from the supposition that it is the grand haunt of the wood demons.

Geology can tell us somewhat about Habberley though she has denied it the custody of the relics of its former inhabitants.

We find it writ on one of her truthful pages, that during the Tertiary Epocha, England was divided from Wales by an arm of the sea: this strait now exists as a simple river – the Severn, - banded on either side by tracts of heath, which in the far gone periods referred to, figured as salt water marshes and estuaries. The most easily recognizable in this neighbourhood are on Wassail heath, of which Habberley is one of the heads: -- Burlish Common, and Hartlebury Common.

But reason points out the probability of organic remains existing in this estuary, and we shall find the assumption a correct one.

On Wassail Common, to the South of the Valley, immediately underneath the wood, fossils occur in considerable abundance this being the next place we shall visit, we will be on the look-out, and doubtless our search will be rewarded.

We will now descend, and taking the course of the Valley, steer for this more fossiliferous district. Pray notice Pekkit Rock, which from the infinity of inscriptions it is covered with, may challenge an Egyptian Hieroglyph Obelisk in all save antiquity.

Habberley is strong in the hold of creeping abominations, Snakes, Lizards. Blindworms and Newts form by far the largest item in its population returns. We pass a viper, suspended from the forked twig of an overhanging tree, this is done in accordance with the popular superstition, that however mutilated a snake may be, if it can reach its hole, it will live till the evening.

There is mystic meaning in the custom, that carries us back to ophitic rites and ceremonies practised by nations long vanished from the stage of the world. (See Note 8)

There are deeper and more mysterious tenets lingering in the household superstitions of the present day, than we think of: rites, - once the all-important principles of a nation, now exist as trivial and scarcely heeded customs, yet bear upon their ancient brow unmistakable proofs of their origin.

We are now on Wassail common, and observe small beds of gravel, and debris scattered over it, it is amongst these we must search.

We soon make "a find" in Corallines: a large mass of Ashea, and a Milleporite washed from the Silurian rocks, claim the first place in our collecting bag: we soon add others. Tubiporites, and the rarer coral - Favosites Gothlandica are scattered around, with fragments of mountain Limestone and clay slate, brought down from their respective localities by fluvial action. [fluvial rather than pluvial.]

Teeth of Rhinoceri are occasionally found, a woman residing at the little cottage on the heath possesses a fine molar, in a curiously silified state. These are, however, rare.

Prof: Buckland in a lecture delivered before the Worc: Nat: Hist: Society (AD 1850) mentioned the existance of recent sea-plants upon Hartlebury Common.

That plants, indigenous to the ocean, should after centuries of isolation, still flourish, at once establishes the fact, that the sea once covered the valley of the Severn, and shows that the earth retains considerable saline proportions.

They were plants allied to the Equisetæ.

We now approach nearer to the river and see before us the ancient borough of Bewdley. We pass through it to arrive at the next point in our ramble: Ribbesford. This, a little hamlet, nearly hidden by wide spreading trees, can boast of one of the most ancient Churches in the County. Large, low, and massive, crowded with antiquities and relics of the past, – the church of Ribbesford has peculiar claims to our notice.

The universal trio, so inseparably connected with a village church – a yew-tree, an "affliction sore" and a sun-dial are first apparent to us.

Observing these, we plunge through an army of epitaphical wonders (see note 9), emblems of mortality and corpulent cherubims (see note 10), and emerge before the lion of the place, a mysterious carving, situate upon the fan-shaped lintel of the northern door, and known as "John of Horshill".

And thereon hangeth a tale, which is, briefly, as followeth. John of Horshill was a mighty hunter, flourishing soon after the Conquest. The carving is said to represent a celebrated shot he performed. Hunting one day near the Severn, the legend declareth that he started a fine stag, which "took" in the direction of the river: fearing to lose it, he discharged an arrow, which piercing the animal, continued its flight and struck a salmon, which had, (as is customary with those fish) leaped from the surface of the water, with so much force as to transfix it. This being considered a very remarkable shot, a carving representing it was affixed to the Church of St. George, at Ribbesford then in course of erection. (See Note 11).

But a closer inspection of the carving reveals its true character. It exhibits a rude human figure with a bow, before whom a nondescript creature, transfixd with an arrow is lying. Now as this animal possesses two very apparent legs, its claims to being a fish are very slight, and we recognize it forthwith as a beaver. [*see Appendix 3*]

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(Footnote related to previous 13 lines)

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| See myself in "Notes & Queries" Vol. V | } | |
| See Edw ^d Bradley in "Notes & Queries" Vol. V | } | passim. |
| See Mr Noake in "Notes & Queries" Vol. V | } | |

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The rationale of it then, is this – the carving is emblematical of certain privileges enjoyed by

"the monks of old" in the slaughter of both terrestrial and aquatic game: the land animals being represented by the stag, the water game by the beaver. And in confirmation of this, we find a small island, not far from Ribbesford still known as Beaver Island, for, saith the "anncyente Cronicles" "In y^e Severne Rivere are plentie and Grette store of Beevers".

There is another version of the Legend, "got up" by Geo: Griffiths, for which see "Notes & Queries vol v p270." (*Note: Vol 5 p270 does not yield this article and seems to be an incorrect reference*).

It is a very interesting question why our Forefathers chose the yew as the inseparable attendant upon the outer state of the churches they erected.

Apart from its grave and sombre appearance, I cannot help recognizing a mysterious embodiment of the spirit of evil as the intention of planters. We know that in all mediæval edifices there is a manifest endeavour to place in juxta-position the spirits of good and evil, -- to materialize the idea of an adversative spirit, antagonistic to the Church's teachings, and hurtful to her efforts of advancement: I look upon the grotesque cephalic (see Note 12) corbels as one modification of this, and would interpret many equally mysterious emblems by referring them to the same actuating desire.

The Yew is certainly the most deadly of our indigenous productions, and therefore would be chosen as the representative of a spirit of destruction, the opposite to one, that giveth life by its teachings, of which the Church is the sensible sign. [see Notes & Queries vol vii (my own paper, in which the idea is broached, and successfully combated by Rev. M Margoliouth).]

From this endeavour of the human mind, to place an iconism prominently before itself, so as to be observant by its outward sences, has arisen every system of Idolatry, even the finer and loftier systems of Toroaster and the Magi.

Well, we must bid the Church adieu, and go fresh into the world again.

Let us notice a very common though remarkable trace of superstition, still prevalent among us. On the great oaken door of the old Manor house hard by (now, by the way, used as a barn) three inverted horse-shoes are nailed; they date back to the 17th Century, and yet their efficiency in keeping away evil spirits is as firmly believed in as when they were first nailed up: showing that the most mysterious ideas are fixed the longest in the human mind, and are the most difficult to eradicate.

We are now close upon the Severn, and nearly opposite a part of the great estuary, known as Burlish Common: there are gravel pits here, noted for fossils of many kinds.

We will imagine a ferry, and cross over to view. The heath possesses the same features as the neighbouring ones of Wassail and Habberley, but the gravel pits have brought to light more of its treasures.

Fossils were first noticed here by M^r. Buchan, of Aggborough, who found a fine branch of Lepia-dondren (Carboniferous Sys:) in one of the pits and presented it to the Museum of the late Earl Mount-Norris. During my last visit I discerned fragments of Silurian, Carboniferous and Mountain Limestones, Shale, Clay slate, Greywache and various plutonic rocks, with pebbles of Jasper and Marbles, containing Madrepores & Zoophytes also various specimens of earthy minerals, ochres and marls, with rarer Steatite (soap stone) a few detached fossils may be picked up among the debris, chiefly Silurian bivalves (See Note 13).

By Steering a little to the North, we arrive at a noticable place, of which the chief feature is an isolated sandstone rock in a valley, rejoicing in the appellation of "the Devils Spadeful". And, of course, to so wild a place, is attached a legend, which savours marvellously of the mythic tales of Teutonic days, when the Devil was supposed to be the prime mover of any and every earthly incident.

But to our tale.

A long time ago, before the Monkey tribe discontinued Tobacco, ["When pigs were swine and monkeys chewed tobacco." (Old nursery rhyme.)] – the people of Bewdley were a faithful, straight walking race, who said nay to the Devil's suggestions and would have none of his counsel. So at length Diabolus waxed with wrath, and failing to make an impression mentally, finally determined to do so physically – so off he started to Pandemonium to select a fit instrument of destruction.

" Now there was an old woman
who Lived under a hill" –

in the neighbouring forest of Wyre. This dame had some time previous, laid in a necessary stock in trade of a Prophetess, and seeing "the papers" rather oftener than the natives generally, could foretel, with tolerable accuracy, any minor event that was looming in the future".

Now about the time the Devil had determined the destruction of the "faithful City" the old woman had felt sundry symptoms of impending danger, so after shaking her head an indefinites number of times, she sallied forth to see what was "up".

"And far she had not gone, I trow" before she got hold of the facts of the case, and not only the mere facts, but the modus operandi, for it was the Devil's plan to plant a vast rock in the bed of the Severn, and thus swamp the town, and drown its inhabitants.

So she gathered a meeting, and proclaimed the matter, and the Bewdlerians ran wild with fright and emotion. And some said one thing and others spake differently. And they gave out their voice in weeping. But while this was about their deliverance had been effected. The adversary had been 'done' on this wise.

A poor cobbler, (bow legged by the bye) had left the town that morning with a quantity of worn and aged shoes, pendant from his shoulders by a cord.

Under a slight eminence near Oldinton, he descried the Devil resting a vast rock which he carried upon a spade, and uncertainly gazing round the landscape. On the cobbler approaching, he accosted him with the enquiry if he could direct him to Bewdley? [The Town, lying in a hollow, cannot be seen even from the summit of the "Spadeful".]

The man of soles took his cue instanter, knowing from the general habits of his interrogator that he was up to no good. "Do you see the shoes I carry?" he asked. The Devil assented. "They were new when I left, so you may guess the distance from their present condition.

Very blank the Devil looked –
East and West looked he
Up and down the river – but
Saw nothing of Bewdley.

His topography was evidently at fault.

So he put his burden down
And with an angry growl
Started with his empty spade
Some where else to prowl.

Very fast the Cobler ran –
Till his bow-legs straighter grew
And the boots upon his shoulders,
In all directions flew.

Soon Sabrina's stream he gained
Their was no bridge I trow –
So in a little coracle,
Over he did go.

"The Devils done" – the Cobler cried
Then sank exhausted down;
And thus the legend doth declare.
A cobbler saved the town.

—

The Rock is generally supposed to be an erratic drift, its formation is however the same as the neighbouring hills – viz. Old Red Sandstone. It is about 80 paces in length and nearly the same in width – covered with gaunt Firs, and environed by a marsh, whose contents are usually absorbed by the heats of summer. About half way up is a small cave familiarly known as the "Devil's Kitchen". It is perhaps, the most lonely spot in the district. Nor can we wonder that it is invested with so romantic a legend.

Skirting the domains of Spring-grove we emerge into the turnpike road between Kidder^m. & Bewdley: a little below the Lea Farm.

We shall not have much of interest in our walk home. Nor can we add to our stock of legendary lore. The view obtained from the summit of Summer Hill is very fine. Observing this we descend, and soon find ourselves in the precincts of the ancient Borough
" of Kidderminster."

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Unfortunately, many 'Note' pages are missing: just a few are preserved at the end of the booklet.

Note 3.

Kinver. A wild, and very hilly district lying between Enville and Stourbridge is known by the name of Kinver Edge. There are two Camps traceable among its heights, one evidently Danish. A very fine celt, was picked up in the lines of the latter camp, some years ago, it is now in the possession of M^r. E. Baugh, of Wribbenhall.

There is much interesting to the Botanist, as well as the local Antiquary on the "Edge" – I am not aware of any fossils being discoverable here, though gravel occurs at a slight depth and veins of coal intersect its internal structure, though no attempt has been made to turn them to account. Save the few pits dug at Shatterford distant about 2½ miles W.

Another Camp of similar shape exists upon the Clent Hills, here M^r. W.F. Mathews found part of a British querne, of blue granite – now in my possession. I am not aware of any other relics being found in either locality.

Note 4.

Caldwall: Underneath the only remaining tower of this castle there exists a large, and finely preserved cellar, with groined arches, of solid masonry; massive and ornamental in their details. –

Note 8.

Ophitism.

To trace back this most ancient of all superstitions to its source, we must dive to the utmost Antiquity; to the earliest Mosaic period.

Its germ arose in Paradise. The temptation scene, which exhibited the advent of an antagonistic power, - a spirit of wisdom and evil, endued the minds of the tempted with a foreshadowing of the power it was destined to sway. No sooner was the temptation consummated – than Adam recognized the existence of a spirit, hitherto unknown to him, possessing the most subtle knowledge, the most mysterious wisdom. How then can we wonder at our first parents regarding the Serpent with an indefinable reverence, which degenerated – ere long into positive Idolatry, not perhaps in the Patriarch himself, but certainly in his descendants. But the flood came, and by the desolating grandeur of an expiring world, the outraged dignity of her Creator was appeased, and it may have been thought the reigning superstition exterminated. But no – from this period clear evidences are shadowed down to us of the hold it had taken of the human mind: – and as years rolled on, we find it assuming a tangible shape in the Dragon of Assyria, and the "Great Serpent" of Scandinavian Mythology. We cannot suppose that the deluded notaries actually worshipped the Devil under this (its primitive shape) we find this was not the case: in these the earlier ages, it was the idea, the blank, iconism of a supreme being that was even the object of adoration, though shrined by their blinded delusions in the very form chosen by the evil one.

India next fell a victim, and here it still exists in the greatest and beguiling form. About this time (say B.C. 1500) it appears to have degenerated into positive devil worship nullifying altogether the idea of a superior Being. Such are the yet existing Devil-worshippers of Ceylon.

From the old world it speedily travelled to the New and attained its greatest power and dominion in the Mexican Idolatry, in those sanguinary rites, unequalled in their horrid details by the fiercest superstition of that benighted era.

In corroboration of these facts, we find the mystic ophitic symbols engraven upon the oldest relics of antiquity – Assyrian Cylinders and tablets – Mexican and Aztec obelisks and altars – Huidoo and *(Some pages are missing here.)*

Note 13.

Burlish Common Fossils.

In addition to the enumerated varieties I may add – an abundance of water-worn pebbles of Caradoc Sandstone (of which the nearest locality is Ankerdine Hill near Martley,) enclosing Tentaculites and Orchii; and a few Chertsey Flints with curious star zoophyte (Query? Bryosoma?) imbedded in them.

There are three un-numbered pages at the end of the booklet which contain:

List of Land and Fresh water shells found in the vicinity of Kidderminster.

Note. Inland ones are Marked **I**.

The Fresh Water **FW**.

| | | | |
|-----|-----------------------|---|--|
| FW. | Paludina viviposa | - | River Stour. |
| FW. | Paludina achatica | - | Do. Brooks |
| " | Bythinia tentaculate | - | Do. Do. |
| " | Valvata piscinulis | - | Do. Near Wolverley. |
| I. | Vitrina pellucina | - | Wassail Heath under stones. |
| " | Helix aspersa | - | Hedgesides |
| " | Helix hortensis | - | Hedgesides |
| " | Helix nemoralis | - | Hedgesides |
| " | Helix arbustorum | - | Shatterford. |
| " | Helix fusca | - | In woods |
| " | Helix fulva | - | Do. |
| " | Helix hispida | - | Do. |
| " | Helix concinna | - | On Trimpley Gr. |
| " | Helix virgata | - | Hedges. |
| " | Helix caperata | - | Hedges. |
| " | Helix ericarium | - | Shatterford (rare). |
| " | Zonites radiatus | - | In woods.). |
| " | Zonites alliarius | - | Wolverley (rare)). |
| " | Zonites nitidulus | - | Shatterford.). |
| " | Zonites chrystallimus | - | Plentiful on hedge banks. |
| FW | Succinea Pferrei | - | Falling Sands. Stour |
| " | Succinea oblonga | - | Do. " |
| I. | Azeca tridens | - | Under stones at the Devils Spadeful (rare) |

Fresh water Land Shells cont^d

| | | | |
|----|----------------------|---|--|
| FW | Pupa marginate | - | Wolverley – (Stour) |
| I. | Pupa junipera | - | Shatterford – (very rare) only 1 ever found. |
| I. | Clausilia bidens | - | Do. |
| " | Clausilia Rolphii | - | Do. very rare |
| " | Clausilia nigricans | - | Near Stourport |
| FW | Lymneus auricularis | - | Wolverley (Stour and many Brooks. |
| " | Lymneus pereger | - | Stankland Pool. |
| " | Lymneus Stagnalis | - | Do. & (Stour) . |
| " | Ancylus fluvialibis | - | Under stones everywhere: size of Δ |
| FW | Planorbis corneus | - | Stour.) plentiful in |
| " | Planorbis marginatus | - | Do. -) almost every brook |
| " | Planorbis vortex | - | Do. -) or watercourse |
| " | Planorbis contortus | - | Do. -) in the district |
| I. | Cyclostoma elegans | - | Shatterford |
| FW | Cyclas rivicola) | | common in the Stour and under all tributary streams. |
| | - cornea) | | attaining an unusual size. |
| FW | Anodon cygneus. | | Stankland Pool. |
| FW | Unio pictorum) | | occurring in every pool round the Town, |
| " | - tumidus } | | and in great abundance in the Canal near |
| " | - Batavis) | | Wolverley. |

| | | | |
|----|----------------------|---|---|
| " | Dreissina Polymorpha | - | Canal. Wolverley. |
| FW | Neritina fluviatilis | - | <u>very</u> rare. 1 specimen obtained from the Severn near Stourport, several others from the Teme near Broadwas. |

(Mem^d. Dr Turton says N. fluviatilis is wholly confined to the southern part of the Island, so that finding it in Worcestersh^r is very uncommon and worthy of note.

Notes on the character and habits of the Natives.

The 'simple' guileless character of the English Countryman is too well known in its general details to warrant a lengthened dissertation. That this freshness is drawn from the bright, glorious scenery they dwell among – is evident.

But there are characters to be met with of such extreme singularity, that they may well claim a place in the Biographia Curiosa. Such a one is Thomas Smout, a small farmer (now dwelling near Ludlow) He is better known among his neighbours as the "Eastern Poet" from his peculiar facility in turning everything into metre. He is rather revered by the labourers, who receive his quaint and nomadic sayings as truisms of immense intrinsic value - Witness the following specimens. He one night under the influence of an aimable weakness fell from his horse, and was found – some short afterwards – lying

The remaining leaves of the booklet are missing!

Appendices added by the transcriber

Appendix 1

Further observations related to Baxter's House, Kidderminster.

George Roberts states above (page 3) that "The house of Baxter has likewise disappeared" This does not necessarily mean totally demolished. "Cuthbert Bede" in 1852 (Notes & Queries Vol. 5 p 565 June 12th) writes: " Three or four years since the house fell before the march of modern improvements, and none of its old features can now be recognised."

Mr Bealby writing in Notes & Queries Vol. 5 p481 May 22nd recalled visiting Kidderminster in 1836 and visited the house in High Street (inhabited by a grocer) "... in which he (Baxter) is said to have resided.". "... but I had my doubts, from a difference of opinion I heard stated as to this being the actual house."

Appendix 2

On page 4 Roberts suggests that there are many countrywide legends similar to that he described in relation to the building of the Church of St Mary & All Saints, Kidderminster. That is indeed so, and many were topical at the time George was writing. Some of these can be seen in articles published in Notes & Queries 1852: Vol. 5 p436, Vol. 5 p524, Vol. 6 p50 and Vol. 6 p71.

A further example, which resembles the Kidderminster legend quite closely, is associated with the lovely Llanfihangel Genau'r Glyn (Church of St Michael in the opening of the valley) which is found in Ceredigion (Cardiganshire) between Aberystwyth and Borth. This church sits on a wooded hillside below the ruins of a Norman Motte & Bailey fort, Castell Gwallter, which was built by Walter de Bec c. 1110.

The story goes something like this: The original church was to be built on a nearby low lying site at Glanfrêd, but every night the builders' work was destroyed by a supernatural power which was heard to proclaim: " St Michael's church in the opening of the valley, only Glanfrêd can be here".

It has been suggested that the story arises from a dispute between local inhabitants living at Glanfrêd and the incomer Walter de Bec over the site of the church. If this was the case then, clearly, the latter won the argument. However, records suggest that de Bec's castle was soon overrun by Welsh forces well before the Church was built so the origin of the tale would seem to be buried in mythology.

Another fable described in 'Abbeys' by M R James, GWR 1926, relates to the Founding of Abingdon Abbey: "Heanus founded his monastery on Abendon Hill c. 675 but made little progress with building; all that he built one day fell down on the morrow. A hermit who lived in Cumnor Wood came to him and told of a vision he had had of men with carts taking stone and timber away from the site. He had rebuked them and they replied: 'Go and tell Heanus that God wills not agree to have the church built here, but at Seovechesham, where the place shall be marked out for him by a sign'. Now, Seovechesham was owned by Heanus and thither he went and found, near the Thames, a foundation marked out by furrows. So he moved the site of his Abbey to Seovechesham and called the place – 'Abingdon'."



Carved tympanum over main doorway to Ribbesford church - 2 May 2008

George Roberts supports his suggestion of the creature in the tympanum carving being a beaver by referring (page 6) to an island "not far from Ribbesford" bearing the name Beaver Island. There is presently a small island less than half a mile from Ribbesford Church in the river just upstream of Blackstone Rock, but there seems to be no recent knowledge of a name associated with it. However, Bevere Island is clearly marked on the 1999 Explorer OS 204 Map [SO837595] some 8 miles away near Claines; could the origin of this name refer back to beavers?

The fables associated with this carving were much in discussion in the 1852 editions of Notes & Queries. For example, in Vol. 5 Jan 10th p29 "H. Corville Warde" of Kidderminster described the hunting scene (much as given by George Roberts above) and sought facts about John of Horshill.

The Rev. Edward Bradley, writing as "Cuthbert Bede" in the Sept 4th issue of Notes & Queries Vol. 6 p216, discussed the legend in some detail and, in addition, provided a far more extravagant and romantic version involving the successful wooing of the daughter of the local Lord by a penniless but handsome hunter. It was a timely intervention by an unfortunate salmon that overcame the Lord's objections. However, like George Roberts, Cuthbert Bede felt that the creature on the right of the carving was more likely to be a beaver than a salmon. No doubt there had been some discussion on these matters in Kidderminster antiquarian circles.

John Noake (Notes & Queries Vol. 6 p288 25th Sept 1852) is sceptical of both legends and assigns the more romantic version as being the invention of a local writer – a Mr Griffiths - 5 or 6 years

before the date of the 1852 contributions. He suggests that the sculpture is merely a descriptive embodiment of the nature of the game hunting locality which, he avers, was used for that purpose in medieval times by the Monks of the Monastery at Worcester.

Transcriber's Note

This transcription is taken from a handwritten booklet produced by George Roberts in 1853 when he was 22 years of age. The booklet was donated to the Kidderminster & District Archaeological & Historical Society in 2007 by Margaret Earnshaw of Darwin, Australia. Margaret is a descendent of Frederick Roberts, a younger brother of George.



George Edward Roberts

The Roberts family ran a draper's business in the Bull Ring, Kidderminster, from as early as 1832, and possibly a few years before then, until the 1880's. George Roberts had an abiding and knowledgeable interest in Natural History with a particular predilection for the Geological sciences, and he spent a great deal of time exploring local quarries searching for fossils. He published a number of books and scientific papers: amongst them, of particular local importance, were 'The Valley of Habberley and Hill of Trimpley' (1857) and 'The Rocks of Worcestershire' (1860). In 1860 George moved to London where he took up the position of Clerk to the Geological Society. He died at his mother's house in

Kidderminster on the 21st December 1865 at the young age of 32. George is buried in St George's Churchyard together with his father and mother, Edward and Jane. The gravestone can still be seen.

In transcribing these notes I have attempted to maintain the sometimes quaint spelling and grammatical expression of the author. Footnotes are generally included in the body of the text in square parenthesis [...]. Comments and appendices written by me are shown in italic text.

Bob Millward February 2009