

THE FRENCHMAN'S HIGHWAY, TODDINGTON

The above appellation is the name of that portion of the Leighton road in Toddington parish, commencing where it leaves the Green and continued about threequarters of a mile, or to where the boundaries of the parish of Chalgrave and Toddington meet.

This certainly is but a small distance, but the tradition (well known to all parishioners) attached to the Frenchman's Highway and Warmark, and the many discoveries which have been made by the unearthing at various times of so much that has helped to support the tradition, have been on a scale sufficiently to surpass anything of the kind for the rest of the parish put together. I am aware of my inability to add much that is wholly new concerning this particular spot, but holding the belief that there are some in the parish who are interested in all that pertains to it, however antiquated and unattractive it may seem to strangers and others who can lightly look upon the past, and are as a rule more expectant of the new and the future – for such as these I am aware these notes are without interest ; and believing the little concerning this subject which has come under my own observation may even be less to others who are probably as anxious as myself to know all that can be known respecting it, it is for such as these that the following appears. I have in my possession a letter from the late C. Roach Smith, the celebrated antiquary, to my father, respecting the antiquities, &c of this spot. He also writes on looking over the *Archaeologica* (I presume he means the *British Archaeological Society's Journal*), “ I have come across a paper in Vol. 27, on discoveries made at Toddington in a place called the Frenchman's Highway; the writer of it was the late H. Brandreth Esq., Houghton, and he refers to a History by an anonymous author in which a notice of the discovery of an extraordinary number of Saxon things in 1819 is given, in a field belonging to Mr. Hicks &c.” Up to the present I have not seen the volume I just mentioned , but I have by me a copy of the work described as being anonymously written, and it is chiefly to this (Dunno's originals part the 4th 1822 Toddington Antiquities) , I am indebted to the following, the heading of which is “ further particulars relating to those curious antiquities, that were dug from several fields in the parish of Toddington in the year 1819, near the road or place, by the inhabitants traditionally named the Frenchman's Highway &c.” then adding, “ since writing my former account of the finding in digging gravel, weapons, pieces of armour &c “ (Here it is noticeable the writer has twice referred to, to previous particulars and writings, but I have no Knowledge of their contents or where the originals are to be found) Continuing he says, “ I met with intelligent persons who were eye-witnesses to what I have related before, and who have informed me of further particulars, likewise I have obtained some of those antiquities there found, and taken sketches from others in possession of various persons in the neighbourhood.” (Here I would like to ask, are any of these antiquities still extant?) I am afraid not, and repeat my regret with Dunno, that numbers of curious articles are for ever lost which would have gratified the mind of the antiquarian and historian, and furnished a pleasing addition to the history of my native country. He then states the extent of ground was of far greater dimensions than he had previously stated, for these things, he says, were found all over the field belonging to Mr. Hicks of Toddington and in part of the adjoining fields. He considers there were some thousands buried there from the large quantities of black earth which was thrown out with the gravel in solid masses, and from the number of spears, daggers, &c., there found, also pieces of swords and daggers with two and three edges, and others like spits were found, with numbers of buckles, rings and other brass pieces of a circular form, probably used as boxes or centres to shields, and buckles for breast-plates, embossed with ornaments &c. Also at the same time an olla, or small urn, containing beads of various colours and curious forms. (referring to the beads, I have heard my father say that he had seen many of them, and that they were of all colours and that the substance of them more resembled sealing wax than anything else he could compare them to.) Continuing, he says some ancient coins were found (but not many), considerable quantities of spear heads, pieces of sword blades, &c. were dug out of both fields, and many were worked up by the smiths in the town and neighbourhood. Then he describes the two spear heads lately dug out in the eastern part of the parish (some two miles distant at Cow Bridge). Attached to this description, is a plate containing eight different specimens of antiquities that were then in existence. (I add here that this same plate also appears in *Dunstaplelogia* by Charles Lambourn, 1859, but only some eight lines of description and that in a footnote). An abbreviated description of Dunno's is, for fig.1, portion of an Ancient helmet weighing 2 lbs; fig.2, part of a spear head 8in long and 2in broad (adding the proprietor of the field presented him with two) fig.3, a piece of copper overlaid with a thin plate of fine gold, highly ornamented 5in.long and 3in.broad ; fig.4, side view of Ditto ; fig.5, curious beads, obtained from the wife of the person who found the ornament no.3 ; fig.6, olla's or urn of reddish clay, which were filled with small bones.

fig.7 and 8, are the two spear heads from Cow Bridge. I think the following is proof of the multiplicity of objects found, for he says, “ I lately conversed with a labourer who was employed in digging gravel in those fields, who stated that he one day found four of those circular plates just mentioned of superior workmanship, and was informed after he had parted with them that they were most part gold and marked with flowers or figured work all over ; the beads he said were found in masses in various parts of the fields, and the small pots filled with little bones were very numerous in one part of the field