

Recitations

The third, the mystery did unfold
And brought the secret out to light

Some wags, who overheard the plot
Which they had laid the day before
'Ere they had reached the destined spot
Had closed upon themselves the door

And there they act the goblin parts
That caused the alarm the party feels
That chased the courage from their hearts
And put their valour in their heels
And the brave crew of watchers had
The brunt of many a joke to bear
From rustics who were but too glad
To taunt them with that night of fear.

R. Maynard Jan 15th 182-

And years have passed, and one by one
The actors who their parts have played
At the Old Church, - again have gone
To that Churchyard - and there have stayed.

*The large stable clock at the Manor.

Chronicle Hills and Nine Wells.

There were formerly some mounds or burrows situated in a field between Whittlesford and Thriplow on the edge of the high ground where the Moor called Gotmoor, which forms part of the low ground of which Thriplow Common is a continuation. In the year 1818 these tumuli were cleared away by Mr. Hollick (old E.b) to fill up some of the hollows near to improve the land for agriculture - and then numbers of interesting Antiquities were discovered many of them of undoubted Roman origin. In one of them some skeletons were found, some in a sitting posture, others lying down. Spears were found by their side. There was also found the foundations of a Roman

Recitations

Villa, with a portion of a bath with a water pipe to carry off the water, and many other relics and for years pieces of Roman tile some with marks on them could be picked up on the fields and in the beautiful stream of water near by called 'Nine Wells.' (This stream is still running - 1907- the water rises up from under the ground and bubbles up in many tiny fountain like streams forming the head for the brook which I have never known to be dry altho' of course it flows more swiftly in wet seasons.)

My father who was a boy when these burrows were opened afterwards (1866) wrote an account of it to recite at the Institute and as I think it very interesting, I will put it here:

Chronical Hills and Nine Wells.

To diversify our entertainment this evening I have (instead of searching for an author to read from) taken as a subject our own native village, or as I ought rather to say, (for the present) one of it's environs, and I have no doubt, that at a future opportunity some one more talented than myself, especially if he has passed a long life time here, might in other parts of our village find matter for bringing pleasant remembrances to many an old and even more recent inhabitant. I shall lay my scene on the West side, in the valley which separates us from the neighbouring village of Thriplow.

I shall first invite you to picture to yourselves that valley as it might appear a thousand years before the commencement of the Christian Era - when all along Gortmoor, the lower part of Whiteland, and the land which is now cornfields, but which till within these few years was Thriplow Moor. There stood a placid lake interspersed here and there with a small island; amongst the reeds and rushes of which lay hid strange amphibious animals, and over and around which flew the Stork, the Heron, and the wild birds which have now retired to the more fenny parts of the world. Through the water might be seen the reptile which wallowed in the black boggy mud, or the Pike watching for prey.

The lake was probably a quarter of a mile in breadth and it's length was from the corner of our boundary at the Turnpike, reaching down to Newton

or further. On its banks towards the South, as you approach our village (for we will conjecture nothing as to the North or Thriplow side) but as you left the border of the lake and ascended Whittlesford field, you would then have had to pass through a forest of majestic Oaks – not the little pigmy things which our impatient generation cannot afford to let grow to their full size but such as the fine fellow which is now the pride of our parish, and rears his gaunt body and swings his stalwart arms in Balls' Meadow more resembles.

In this forest you would see the ancient Druid, the priest of the religion of our aboriginal forefathers performing his mysterious and cruel rites.

I would now bring to your remembrance a beautiful rivulet which still exists there flowing from a spring perhaps unequalled in this of our country; clear as chrystal the bright water issues into daylight through the white chalk bed at the bottom of the pool, boiling up through innumerable channels, tossing the little particles of earth up some inches into the basin, which ever and anon return to the little mouths from which they are again with endless repetition ejected. When I was a boy the basin was larger than it is now. It has been partly filled in with excavations, of which I shall presently speak.

I then many a time in the sunny weather when I ought to have been at work in my father's field – the Charity farm which is on the top of the hill – stole down to the beautiful water to slake my thirst, or pull off my shoes and stockings and dabble in the cool fluid, or try to staunch the stream, – which to my thinking flowed with a stronger current than it does now – till accumulated water drove helter skelter all my engineering down the rivulet (which reaches about a hundred yards) into the brook below.

Well that bright water still continues to issue out of the chalk, and scud along down the rivulet, on the border of which a few shady trees grow.

But to return to our forest:– we may let a thousand years slip away, by which time the pent up waters in the lake had forced a freer passage round the Newton and Harston hill; and its width had diminished till it was

Recitations

not a much wider watercourse than the brook we see now in the place of it, into which the rivulet I have described flows. Well, it must have been an attractive spot, and especially round about Nine Wells, for about that time – that is about 2000 years ago – a warlike people, who came from the shores of the Mediterranean Sea, and had conquered most of the civilized world, took a fancy to this land in which we live and in which then lived these Ancient Britons, and so, after many a bloody encounter, the Conquering Romans subdued our savage fore-fathers, and planted the war ensign – the peering Eagle – all over the land, pursuing the hoary Druids into their holy forests, and mingling their blood with that of their sacrifices.

It would seem that one of these conquering heroes was smitten with the beauty of the Whiteland forest; especially with the Spring of Nine Wells, for he built close to it in the part of the valley now called Whiteland Pen, a Villa, in the Roman style, with, as we may infer, all the usual conveniences which the ruined cities of Herculaneum and Pompeii disclose as belonging to the residence of a Roman patrician. We may suppose that by the help of his soldiers, and with the forced services of the conquered natives, he altered the face of the subsided lake and surrounded his residence with a garden and a park.

There is no doubt that he made use of the pure waters which issued from Nine Wells for domestic purposes, and more certainly for ablutions – a bath forming an essential part of a Roman Chief's establishment –; certain I am that he had one, for I have seen it and that it was formed after the old Roman style, with solid stone waterproof walls and paved with variegated stones in tessellated work, many of which are still preserved by an antiquarian in the village.

It appears that the Romans powerful as they were, could not hold their conquest for ever, and so after a few hundred years, they one fine day bid our land good bye, and advised our now half civilized ancestors to take care of themselves, which they did as well as they could, but they however let in the men from the North, and a descendant of the mighty Thor came and found the beautiful Villa, with the fountain of Nine Wells springing up in

it's garden; and he, lacking the taste which it is the business of our Institute to cultivate, set to work with his fierce Northmen and made a ruin of this noble structure, and slew all it's inmates; and there lay their bones rotting in proximity with those of it's former inhabitants, till within these 40 years; when they were exhumed, together with some of their weapons, and the bath of which I have spoken.

It seems that they were not content with the desolation they had made for, as if to obliterate every memento of the obnoxious residence, they raised a mound over it, which till it was leveled with the surrounding surface, and partly used to contract the beautiful spring, went by the name of Chronicle Hill.

It was in leveling this hill by our late eccentric neighbour Mr. Ebenezer Hollick, some forty years ago that the discovery was made of the ruins of the Villa, with the Bath, and the pipe leading from it, and the weapons, and a variety of other articles together with a number of human bones; amongst which latter was a skull which a labourer who lived opposite my house, and who seemed to be a bit of an antiquarian brought to his home out of curiosity, and in the middle of the night was awakened by a loud knocking at his door by a headless skeleton (or what appeared to him to be such) which with a hoarse voice demanded the remaining part of his assens structure, and poor Matthews in his fright was glad to throw the skull out of the window.

The uncovering of these relics took place in my boyhood; but long before this, all Whiteland forest had either rotted off into stumps, or had been cut down by the civilized mixed breed of Britons, Romans, Saxons, Danes and Normans, to which we belong and the land converted into cultivated fields.
R. Maynard.

1. The lake:- Great Nine Wells which the stream of Little Nine Wells runs into - is now dwindled into a deep pool - but many of the old inhabitants believed to be bottomless and haunted. It has never been known to be dry.

Ninewells.

Ninewells is a spring of beautiful, bright and transparent water, perpetually springing from out a chalky bed at the Western boundary of the parish. Near it in the year 1818 were discovered the remains of a Roman Villa and subsequently the three turnidi adjoining were taken down; beneath these mounds called Chronicle Hills were found the remains of ancient inhabitants of this place and neighbourhood; they were skeletons in a sitting position surrounded by impliments of war and the chase. Near this spot too crossed each other, two ancient British Roads, one called the Forceham, or Fosseham Way passing from the top of Barley Hill leaving Heydon and Chrishale to the South, crossing the Icknield Way from Chesterford to Royston, and leaving Triplow to the West it passed this spot, crossed this beautiful stream of water, and this parish in the North West part of it passing on to Little Shelford, thence to Cambridge by what is called Grahams Farm at which place are the remains of an ancient camp. The other road was a continuation of Ashwell Street, it crossed the Forceham Road at or near Ninewells passing on in an Eastern direction through the parish of Whittlesford by the South West of Middlemoor, thence into the old lane called 'Moor Lane' as far as Chantry corner, thence by the back of the Parsonage Farm towards the Duxford Road crossing the latter at the top of 'Mill Quick' through Mill field to Bridge Moor coming into the present road about half way between the Railway Station and the Bridge. This latter part of it was, before the enclosure of the parish, used as a way from the village to the bridge and called 'Tinkers Lane.' After crossing the bridge or the ford, it went on to Bourn Bridge where it joined the old road from Chesterford called Icknield Way. The interesting antiquarian halo surrounding this spot, and locality, have drawn upon the imagination and poetical resources of Mr. Robert Maynard and the following lines are the result:

"Who will wish me where the crystal stream
Is welling from under it's chalky bed
Through a hundred mouths to the bright sunbeam
Glittering and dancing in the joy to be free
Bubbling, gushing, tumbling, rushing,
Scudding along in frantic glee,