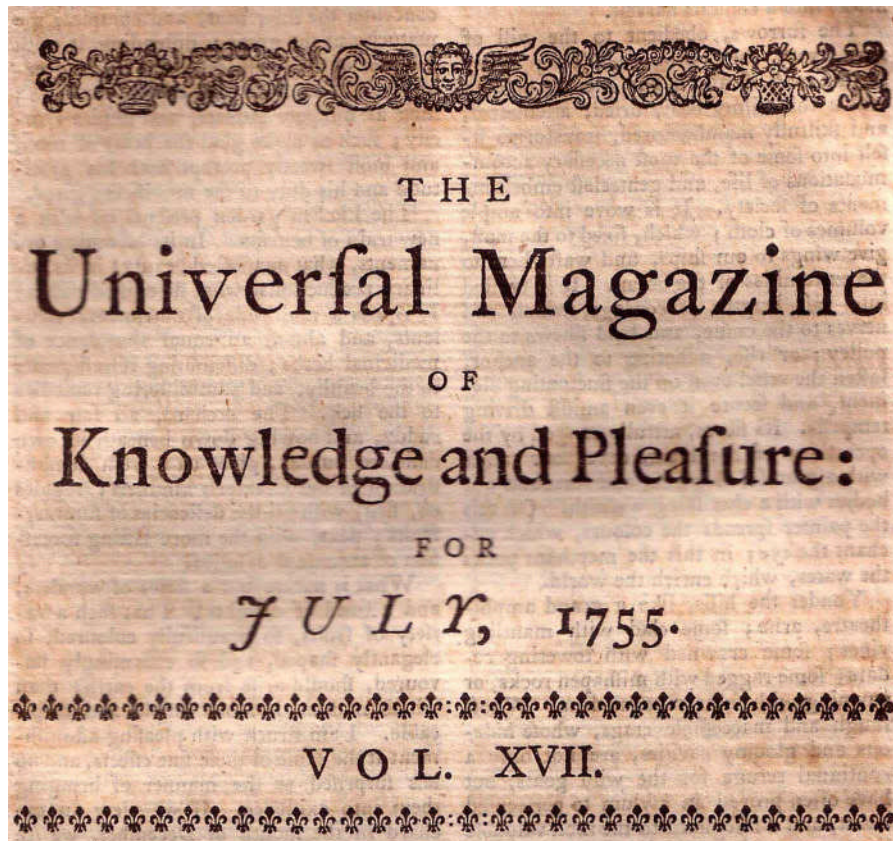


**An Account of Oxfordshire
from
The Universal Magazine
of
Knowledge and Pleasure
July 1755**



*An Account of Oxfordshire.
With an accurate Map of that County.*

OXFORDSHIRE is an inland county, bounded by Buckinghamshire on the east, and with Gloucestershire on the west. On the north, where it terminates in form of a cone, it has Northamptonshire on one side, and Warwickshire on the other; and on the south, where it is widest, it is separated from Berkshire by the river Isis, as far as Dorchester, and from thence by the Thames. It is beautifully diversified with rivers and hills, and the air sweet and healthy. It is about forty-two miles in length, i. e. from Cleydon to Caversham; and twenty-six in breadth, from Cleydon to Faringdon; and, according to Mr. Temple-

man, contains 663 square miles. Others make it 130 miles in circumference, containing, besides its city, fifteen market-towns, 280 parishes, fourteen hundreds, 534,000 acres, 19,700 houses, and 120,000 souls. It sends nine Members to Parliament, viz. two for the county, two for the city, two for its university, two for new Woodstock, and one for Banbury.

The principal rivers of Oxfordshire are the Thames, the Tame, the Charwell, the Evenlode and the Windrush; and, according to Plot, there are sixty others of an inferior rank, besides little brooks.

The Isis, in a long course, washeth the



south side of this county. The Charwell, after it has divided this shire, for some distance, from that of Northampton, flows gently through the middle of the county, and divides it, as it were, into two equal parts. The same waters and fructifies the eastern parts, till, at last, both these rivers, with several other streams, are received into the Isis, near Dorchester. There is a beautiful Latin poem, called the Marriage of Tame and Isis, from whence the following verses are translated :

Here, with soft blasts, obliging zephyrs pass,
And cloath the flow'ry banks with long-liv'd grafs.

The fragrant crown, that her glad hands have made,

Officious flora puts on Isis' head.

The beauteous graces have their business too,

They brush the weeping flowers from their ambrosial dew :

Which joyful concord does, with pleasing care,

Weave into chaplets for the godlike pair :
While Hymen's mounted taper lights the air.

In a fair vault beneath the swelling stream,
The marriage bed the busy Naiads frame ;
Where brightest gems the painted columns grace,

And doubly shine with their reflected rays.
No such great Pelops' kingdom could afford,
Nor lavish Cleopatra for her Lord.

On this the virgins in vast numbers pile
Proud spoils and trophies of the conqu'ring isle :

What Bundic, Gurmund, Brennus, Brute brought home,

From Greece, from Gaul, from Ireland, and from Rome :

What mighty Arthur from the Saxons won,

What Edward from the Scots, and from the French his son.

Now had fair Tame sigh'd for her promis'd spouse,

While down the Cateuchlanian hills she flows ;

And, scarce saluting her old banks, runs by,
Bearing no load, but long virginity :

And this she seems ambitious to lay down,
And see her lover's stream augmented by her own.

With a faint kiss she mocks the walls of Tame,

And leaves behind her nothing but her name.

Yet, tho' impatient Isis' arms to fill,
She stops to bid the Norrisses farewell.

Old Dorchester stands wond'ring at her speed,
And gladly bids the happy match succeed.

Now does the joyful bride new dress'd appear,

Fresh blades of corn tie up her golden hair,

Her shining gown plays with the purpled air.

Blushing Aurora to her hand gives place,
Nor proud Dione boasts so fair a face.

Her lips the rose, her eyes bright gems outdo,
Her hair the lilies, and her skin the snow.

In state she swims, her careful hand throws back,

Her floating tresses on her silver neck.

Proud Isis now his comely head displays,
And cheers the drooping fields with golden rays.

Nor stays he to admire his Tame's charms,
But throws himself (sweet load) betwixt her arms.

Ten thousand kisses do ten thousand meet,
And with their breath the lovers souls unite.

Hence to their bed the happy pair go down,
Where faith and concord speak them into one.

The pipes and cornets echo all around,
While the pleas'd stream returns the grateful sound.

In joyful rings the merry nymphs advance,
And sportive satyrs drive the wanton dance.

While choirs of winged songsters of the air
The woods and groves with tuneful numbers cheer.

Echo, contented now that she's all tongue,
Sounds quick replies to their delightful song.

All things rejoice, and nature's self is glad ;
The painted flowers o'er smiling meadows spread,

To th' universal joy consent, and nod their head.

The wanton loves their harness'd birds drive on,

And clap to see their winged chariot run.

Auspicious Juno, with a graceful smile,
Begins the ancient glories of the isle ;

On her fair brows unwither'd bays appear,
And thus she sings, and tunes her trembling lyre :

How Neptune's sphere the wond'ring isthmus shook,

When their long hold the parted cliffs forsook.

What crimes, what vengeance, brought Alcides o'er,

To dye the crystal Thames with Albi-on's gore,

And spread his monstrous carcase on the shore.

How hither his wild course Ulysses steer'd,
What altars to the angry gods he rear'd !

How Brute with Corinaeus came to land,
And made the savage nations own their new command !

How Cæsar's drooping legions homeward
stood,

Glad to escape from those they'd but in
thought subdu'd!—

Thus sang the goddess! Straight the joyful
stream,

Proud of the late addition to its name,
Flows briskly on, ambitious now to pay
A larger tribute to the sovereign sea.

Oxfordshire is a rich and fertile country; the lower parts are cultivated into pleasant fields and meadows, and the hills, before the late civil wars, were covered with woods; but they were destroyed in such a manner, during those unhappy times, that few places, except the Chiltern country, have fuel sufficient for the use of the inhabitants; and in some places it is so scarce as to be sold by weight. But, tho' most parts of it produce excellent corn, yet its greatest glory is the abundance of meadows and pastures, to which the rivers add both pleasure and convenience. Nor is it only fruitful in grass and corn, but abounds with all sorts of game, and the rivers are well stocked with fish.

There are several monuments of antiquity remaining in this county. Near Chipping-Norton, in the parish of Little Rollwright, are a number of vastly large stones placed in a circular figure, which the country people call Roll-rich-stones, and have a tradition, that they were once men, and turned into stones. They are irregular and of unequal height, and by the decays of time are grown ragged, and very much impaired. The highest of them, which lies out of the ring towards the east, they call the King; because they fancy he should have been King of England, if he could have seen Long-Compton, a village within sight, at a very few steps distance from the stone. Five larger stones, which on one side of the circle are contiguous to one another, they pretend they were Knights or horsemen, and the others common soldiers. It is, according to Dr. Plot, a single circle of stones without epistyles or architraves, and of no very regular figure, except one or two; the rest of them are not above four feet and a half high. What might be the occasion of this monument is not hinted by any inscription upon the stones, nor by any other marks about them; which seems to make it probable, at least, that it was not erected in memory of any persons that were buried there. For, if so, we might expect, as in other places of this kingdom, to meet with a cross or something of that kind implying the design, if a Christian; or, if a Pagan, we might expect to find barrows at some small distance. Besides, Ralph Shel-

don, Esq; a curious antiquary, making a diligent search, in the middle, for some remains, which might lead him to the first design, and particularly for bones, found himself disappointed. Though, if we may judge from a similar monument of antiquity, the bones, if there are any, may more probably be met with, without the circle, as they were found some time since at a little distance from that at Kynet in Wiltshire.

Camden imagines, that this monument was raised in memory of some victory obtained here, perhaps by Rollo the Dane. For, at the same time that he with his Danes and Normans infested England with depredations, we read, that the Danes and Saxons had an engagement at Hokenorton, and another at Scierstane in Huiccia, i. e. at Sherston in Wiltshire. But others alledge, that, how true soever this opinion of its being erected in memory of some victory, may be right in the main, yet the relation it has to Rollo the Dane, will not agree, either with the engagement at Hokenorton nor Scierstane. For the Saxon annals tell us, that it was in 876 that this Rollo made inroads into Normandy, which was after he had been in England; whereas the battle of Hokenorton was in 917, and that of Scierstane an hundred years after. Nor does that passage in Walsingham, which mentions the assistance Rollo sent to King Athelstan, and which is insisted on by a later author, entirely remove the difficulty: Unless we can suppose, which is hardly to be imagined, that Rollo could be of age to plunder England, in the year 875, and make incursions into Normandy, in 876; and that the same Rollo should live to assist King Athelstan, who did not come to the Crown till the year 925. But, besides this difficulty, there is no reason, unless the affinity of names can be supposed a reason, for us to believe that the supposed defeat was in those parts; and, consequently, nothing to support the conjecture.

The common story above-mentioned, which goes current among the people, though it be upon the whole ridiculous enough, yet it may, as is very common in such traditional tales, have something of truth at the bottom. For why may not the large stone, at a little distance, which they call the King, be the kingstolen, belonging to the circle of stones, as Wormius informs us was usually raised for the coronation of the northern Kings: Especially as the learned Dr. Plot has observed from the same Wormius, that this kingstolen, though generally in the middle, was sometimes at a distance from the circle.

At Stanton-Harcourt are several large
stones,

stones, called the Devil's-coits; they are about eight feet high, and, near the base, seven broad. The learned Dr. Plot thinks they were placed there as a monument to the memory of some Britons slain thereabouts; and that they are not natural, but made by art, of a small kind of stones cemented together, whereof there are great numbers in the adjacent fields.

Before we proceed to the description of the several places in this county, we shall give some account of the succession of the title of Earl of Oxford.

This title long flourished in the family of Vere, who derive their pedigree from the Earls of Guines, and their name from the town of Vere in Zealand. They owe the beginning of their greatness in England to King Henry the First, who advanced Alberic de Vere, for his great wisdom and conduct, to several places of honour and profit; as, to be Chamberlain of England, and Portreeve of the city of London: And to his son, Henry, Duke of Normandy, in order to draw him from King Stephen, who had usurped the crown, and to oblige him to his own party, he granted and restored the office of Chamberlain, which he had lost in those civil wars, and offered him the choice of these four earldoms, Dorset, Wilts, Berks, and Oxon. After this Maud, the Empress, and her son Henry, then in possession of the throne, did, by their several charters create him Earl of Oxford. Of his posterity, not to mention every particular person, the most eminent were the following: Robert de Vere, who, being highly in favour with King Richard the Second, was by him advanced to the new and unheard of honours of Marquis of Dublin, and Duke of Ireland, of which he left, as one well observes, nothing but some gaudy titles to be inscribed on his tomb, and matter for discourse and censure to the world.

For soon after, through the envy of the other courtiers, he was degraded, and miserably ended his life in banishment: John de Vere, a person of great knowledge and experience in war, and eminent for his constant fidelity to the Lancastrian party, fought often in the field against King Edward the Fourth, and for some time defended St. Michael's Mount, and was the chief assistant to King Henry the Seventh in obtaining the crown: Another John, in the reign of Henry the Eighth; who was in all parts of his life so temperate, devout, and good, that he was distinguished by the name of John the Good; he was great grandfather to Earl Henry, the eighteenth Earl of this family, and Grandfather to the two noble brothers, Francis and Horatio Vere, who, by their admirable conduct, and their many brave and successful exploits in the Low Countries, added no small lustre to their ancient and honourable family. The said Henry married Diana, second daughter to William Cecil, Earl of Exeter, and died at the siege of Breda, without issue. Upon which Robert Vere, son and heir of Hugh, son and heir of Aubrey de Vere, second son of Earl John the Fifth, was in the Parliament held at Westminster, An. 2 Car. I, restored to this title of Earl of Oxford; who, marrying Beatrix van Hemmema of Friesland, had issue by her Aubrey, Knight of the most noble order of the Garter; who married Diana, daughter of George Kirk, Esq; but, he dying without issue male, this title lay extinct, until her Majesty, Queen Anne, in the tenth year of her reign, bestowed it, together with that of Earl Mortimer, upon Robert Harley, Esq; whom she afterwards advanced to the dignity of Lord High Treasurer of Great Britain; and in which family it still remains.

[To be continued.]