

# Archaeological Notes

## Alton District

### ANCIENT STONE STILE AT FROYLE

By the side of the A.31 road, between Alton and Bentley, at a spot known as Quarry Bottom, Froyle, there is a very interesting and ancient stone stile in the stone wall boundary of the property now owned by Lord Mayor Treloar's College. At the present time (1960) the road here is in the process of widening and improvement, during which a portion of this wall is being demolished.

Through the co-operation of the Divisional Surveyor of the Hampshire County Council, Mr H. D. Linsley, F.R.I.C.S., M.I.MUN.E., and Lieut.-Colonel M. Hurford-Jones of Treloar's College Estate, it has been found possible to arrange the road alignment so that this old stile will not be interfered with, but will still be retained in its present position.

The stile consists of two slabs of stone, shaped to form the foot steps, and joined in the centre by an iron bar. The lower step shows much evidence of wear. According to Mr T. Knight, a late resident of Froyle and schoolmaster there for many years, the stile was always known locally as the 'Roman Stile'. It is very doubtful if it can go back to Roman times, although the Roman villa at Coldrey is not far away. Mr Knight had a theory that, as it is known that many of the walls at Froyle were built by French prisoners during the Napoleonic wars, with stone from Quarry Bottom, the stile was possibly built by them. (The prisoners were housed in what was then 18th century alms-houses, now converted into five cottages on West End Farm, and still known as 'The Barracks'.)

But an examination of the stone of the stile shows that it is of a different texture to that used in the rest of the wall. The well-known local archaeologist, Major A. G. Wade, of Bentley, has examined the stones forming the stile, and claims to have found tool marks similar to marks on datable stones previous to A.D. 1500. The oldest part of Froyle Church, the chancel, can be dated as c. 1340, and as the path from the stile leads to the Church, he suggests that this stile may be of a similar date, which would be in keeping with the stonework of the stile.

It is hoped that the publication of this note with the photograph of the stile may lead to evidence of similar stiles in other parts of Hampshire, and so to a more definite dating of the Froyle stile.

### FROYLE CROSS

In the course of my reading in connection with the monastic houses of this area, I came across an interesting reference to 'Froyle Cross' in Francis Joseph Baigent's *The Abbey of the Blessed Mary of Waverley* (1882).

'On the 25th July 1310 the Abbot Phillip de Bedwynde and the Convent of Waverley undertook certain obligations with regard to their late benefactor, Bishop Nicholas de Ely.' (Bishop of Winchester 1268-1280.) (Here follows the list of the various undertakings in memory of the late Bishop.)

## HAMPSHIRE FIELD CLUB PROCEEDINGS

‘ Moreover we will maintain for ever the marble cross set up for the soul of the said Bishop by his executors at FROYLE, and if it shall happen that the said cross, which God forbid! shall be injured, broken, or entirely thrown down by lightning, thunder or other violent storms, we will erect another in its place there according to our best ability, if not of equal dignity.

‘ In testimony of all these things, we have placed our common seal to these presents, we have taken care to have appended the seal of the reverend father, the Lord Henry, by the grace of God, Bishop of Winchester. Given at Waverley on the Feast of the Blessed James the Apostle, in the year of the Incarnation of our Lord one thousand three hundred and ten.’

(Register of Brother Henry Wodelock, Bishop of Winchester, fol. 138, and Cartulary of the Cathedral Priory, fol. 73.)

In a footnote to the above, Mr Baigent states : ‘ The base of this cross remains at Froyle to this day ’ (i.e. in 1882). ‘ It acquired the name of Froyle Cross.’ In another footnote, ‘ Robert White, of Farnham, in his will dated 16 October 1467 says “ I bequeath for the reparation of the bad and imperfect roads, commencing on this side of the cross called Froyle Cross, to the end of the town of Farnham wherever it is most necessary, the sum of ten pounds ”.’

With Mr Baigent’s statement that the base of Froyle Cross was still in position less than 100 years ago, it seemed to be a worthwhile subject for investigation. I consulted a resident of Froyle, Mr E. R. Hill, who had lived in the parish all his life, who informed me that on the south side of Froyle Church there was a base of a cross which appeared to be ancient, on which a modern memorial cross had been erected. On investigation the base proved to be ancient, and comparing it with other dated crosses, is, I think, mediaeval. Two brass plates record ‘ To the dear memory of Dorothy Mary Summers, beloved daughter of Frank and Constance Summers, died March 29th, 1911, aged 18 years ’. The Summers family were at the time resident at Froyle Place, but the present representative of the family, Sir Spencer Summers, M.P., reports that he was too young at the time to remember any details about the memorial cross erected to his sister.

Presumably the original position of the Nicholas de Ely Cross was beside the old road which runs near the Church, claimed by some to be part of the Pilgrim’s Way, as the present A.31 road is comparatively modern. Without further evidence one hesitates to put forward any theory, but it does not seem improbable that sometime subsequent to 1882, the base of the old cross was removed to Froyle Churchyard, possibly during road improvement, and that, later, the base was utilised for the memorial to Dorothy Summers.

Until further evidence is forthcoming, therefore, the matter must be classed as ‘ unproven ’, but even so, the details of the original erection of the cross to Nicholas de Ely seem sufficiently interesting to be placed on record in the journal of the Hampshire Archaeological Society.

G. E. C. KNAPP.