

Found in the Thames.



FROM source to sea the Thames is full of interest, and as we traverse its banks or float calmly along upon its smooth surface we are constantly reminded of this fact by the number of notable landmarks it is ever presenting to our view—abbeys, monasteries, churches, the residences of famous men, sites of ancient battles—all of which recall to our mind some important event or person with which they have been associated.

But it is not so much with the surface of the river as with its bed that we have now to deal. Many have treated of the former, but the latter has received much less attention, which is somewhat surprising, for the bed of the Thames has preserved as in a museum many objects and relics of the greatest interest which, but for its interposition, would have been lost to us for ever.

Some of these relics have been discovered in a more or less romantic and accidental manner, while a still larger number have been brought to light by that familiar object to all frequenters of the river—the dredger. These somewhat uninteresting-looking appliances are the property of that mysterious but all-powerful body in matters pertaining to the river, the Thames Conservancy, and are employed by them in clearing the river from accumulations of mud and ballast, which would otherwise soon render our great waterway dangerous and unnavigable.

The site of London Bridge has always been a happy hunting-ground for the curiosity-seeker, for the excavations that have taken

place in connection with the structural alterations of the bridge have afforded opportunities to the antiquary of which he has not failed to take advantage. The small Roman bronzes which are represented here were discovered near this spot in 1837. They are of the very highest class of art, the youthful Apollo being a masterpiece of ideal grace and beauty, and the Mercury quite worthy of companionship with the Apollo. These figures are both more or less mutilated, and there is no doubt that the damage was intentional. The figure of Apollo has the marks, on both sides of the leg, of an axe or some other sharp instrument,

which was employed in severing the legs from the body. This was, in all probability, the work of the early Christians, who, connecting them with the idolatrous worship of the Romans, looked upon them as demons or emanations of the devil, and after mutilating and defacing them consigned them, as they thought, to an everlasting grave at the bottom of the Thames. But after lying there more than a thousand years they have

fortunately been brought to light, at a time when their purpose can be better understood and their beauty duly appreciated.

Another interesting little object which was discovered in digging the foundations of the new bridge in 1825 is the small silver figure of Harpocrates, the God of Silence. The attitude of this little figure is natural and full of grace, and the modelling well expresses the flesh rotundity of early youth. A delicately-wrought gold chain crosses the figure in front and passes through a strong loop at the back, together with a gold ring. This



BRONZE FIGURES OF MERCURY AND APOLLO.

mechanism is a part of the original design, and indicates that the image was intended to be secured to some more solid and weighty object.

Many thousands of coins, chiefly in brass and copper, and a considerable number in silver and gold, have been found in the Thames, and vast quantities were rescued in removing the piers of old London Bridge. In making the coffer-dams for the new bridge in 1824 a jet of water threw up a large number of angels and half-sovereigns of the reigns of Henry VII. and VIII., which were seized upon at the time in the name of the Corporation, but what became of them eventually no one seems to know. A Deptford gentleman collected no fewer than six hundred coins he accidentally discovered among the gravel from the Thames which had been used in repairing the pathway alongside the Surrey Canal, and it is a well-known fact that many more have been distributed in a similar manner.

The coins of the Roman Emperors Vespasian and Titus relating to the subjugation of Judæa are monuments of peculiar interest, and equally so are the coins of the Emperor Hadrian relating to Britain; examples of all these have been recovered from the Thames. Upon a large brass coin of Titus the national features of a Jewish male captive can be easily recognised, while a female seated beneath the palm tree is equally truthful and in keeping with the propriety of detail so remarkable in Roman coins.

Of the coins of the Emperor Hadrian of the Britannia type many have been obtained from the Thames. On these Britain is represented as a female, armed and in the attitude of watchfulness, her right foot resting upon a rock, emblematical of the protection and repose ensured to the province by the visit of Hadrian and the

erection of the great wall across the north of Britain.

In 1841 a very considerable number of gold coins were found by a labourer nearly opposite the House of Lords. For some time he kept them hidden away, fearing that if he divulged his secret they would be wrested from him by right of some mysterious power of the law. But eventually he offered them to a collector, who at once purchased the lot, and to whom he subsequently confessed how and where he had discovered them.

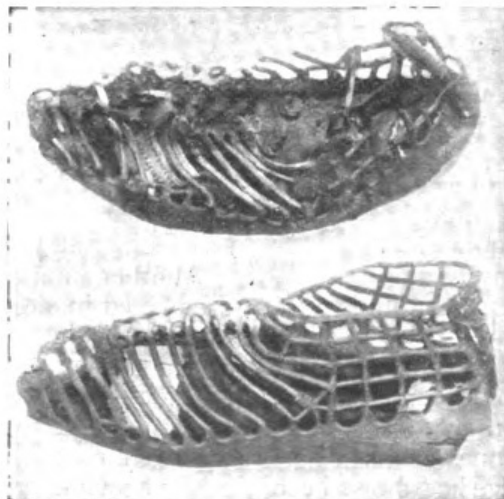
Of Roman remains found in the Thames a very large and important collection might be made, which would add very materially to our knowledge of their owners during the time that they remained in this country. Not the least interesting among them, perhaps, are the pair of sandals shown here,

which are in almost as perfect a state at the present time as when the feet they once covered trod the streets of Roman London. These sandals were dug up several feet below the bed of the river, and before the water had time to evaporate oil was applied to them, by which means they were preserved, and retain even now much of their original character.

The fine head of Hadrian, which is our next illustration, is no doubt a part of one of those colossal statues which adorned the streets of London during the Roman occupation. Several of these statues are known to have existed, and remains of them have been discovered in various places; but this particularly fine head was dredged up from the bed of the river a little below the site of old London Bridge on the Southwark side. It measures sixteen and a half inches in height, and the modelling and execution of the portrait exhibit great artistic skill, as well as perfection in the difficult art of casting metal. A colossal hand, which belonged to this or some other statue



A SILVER STATUETTE OF HARPOCRATES, THE GOD OF SILENCE.



A PAIR OF ROMAN SANDALS.

of equal magnitude, from which it had evidently been broken by force, was fished up a little lower down the river. It is possible that the statues to which these fragments belonged were broken up by the Britons as an insult, when their conquerors left the country, and thrown into the river. The remains of bronze statues which have been found in France and England show that the chief towns of the northern provinces generally were enriched and ornamented with these costly and imposing works of art.



A COLOSSAL HAND, PROBABLY BELONGING TO THE STATUE OF HADRIAN.

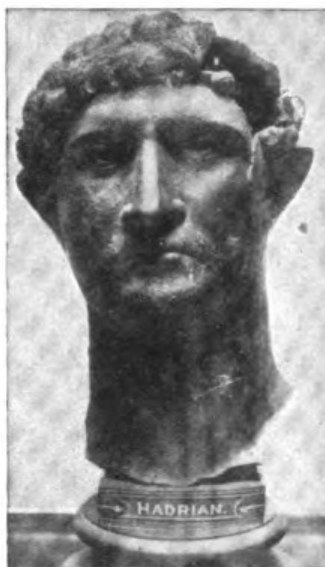
But our next two illustrations carry us back to a still more remote period; even to the time when this island was covered with forests and our ancestors lived a wild and savage life, and were clad only in the skins of the wild beasts slain in the chase. The helmet, which is of bronze

and a fine specimen of Celtic work, was fished up from the bottom of the river near Waterloo Bridge in 1868. It is in a remarkable state of preservation, notwithstanding its immersion of over two thousand years.

The shield is also of bronze, and the finest specimen of Celtic work extant. It is two and a half feet in length and fourteen inches in width, and among the tasteful forms which decorated its embossed field appear curious discs of red enamel. It was discovered in the river near Battersea in 1856, and at the same time a number of arms, including swords, daggers, spears, a



A CELTIC SHIELD—THE FINEST SPECIMEN EXISTING.

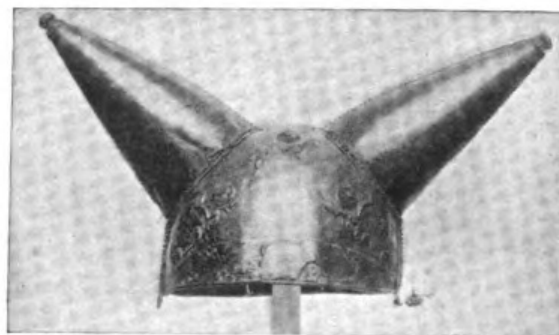


HEAD OF THE EMPEROR HADRIAN, FROM A STATUE WHICH ONCE ADORNED THE STREETS OF LONDON.

Roman soldier's caliga (the shoe worn only by the rank and file), and a human skull, were fished up. Though the tides of centuries have swept over these ancient objects, which in some senses are prehistoric, yet they were all in a wonderful state of preservation.

Of arms and weapons of defence of all descriptions and of all periods, an almost incredible number have been recovered from the Thames, and would, if collected together, be sufficient to form a museum in themselves. Many hundreds of these are already in our public institutions, but a much larger number are in the hands of private owners.

Many of these weapons have been found in and near London, some in building operations in connection with the bridges, and many more have been dredged or fished up by the toilers of the river accidentally.



A FINE BRONZE CELTIC HELMET.

The difference in the state of preservation of these interesting relics is remarkable, as it is almost invariably the case that the arms of the very earliest periods are in much better preservation than those of a later date. Another very important collection of arms was obtained from the river near Kingston Bridge, and it was here too that a very gruesome object was brought to light in 1851. It consisted of a

human skull cleft asunder with an iron dagger, which had a pommel of brass and gold inlaid in the blade, transfixed in it.

Personal ornaments, more or less valuable, have been fished up at all parts of the river. A bargee, in endeavouring to fix his anchor in the bank of the river, unearthed a massive gold pomander, about two inches in diameter. It was of the fifteenth century, and was worn by the ladies of that period attached to the girdle, and usually contained some aromatic scent or preservative against poison and infection.

In the year 1836 a large number of curious objects made of lead or pewter were discovered near London Bridge, and a similar find took place in 1856 in the vicinity of Blackfriars Bridge. For some time they were a source of perplexity to the authorities, but ultimately they were recognised as the "signs" used by pilgrims who had visited the shrines of saints and martyrs as a token or "sign," as they were technically termed, of their having performed their pilgrimage faithfully and truly.

They were purchased at the shrines and were worn on the hat or garment, the devices or symbols, or the portraits or figures of saints, with which they were ornamented indicating the particular place visited. No custom during the Middle Ages was more completely identified with the everyday life of all classes than that of making pilgrimages to favourite shrines, and the earlier part of the year was generally selected, when early spring, lengthening days, and sunny weather inspired yearnings not easily suppressed, and sent forth bands of pilgrims to the great centres of religious attraction. The union of the sacred and secular elements, the pleasure of the journey, and the agreeable company

brought together on these occasions were sufficient causes to render the pilgrimages universally popular. To it we are indebted for the inimitable "Canterbury Tales," which show how widely the love of these religious excursions was spread amongst all classes.

Among the many curious objects which have been fished up by these dredgers is the Seal of Edward II. for the Port of London. It was discovered at Queenhithe in 1810, and was purchased from the finders by a

gentleman who began life as a bricklayer, but who, by his own enterprise and ability, afterwards amassed a considerable fortune, part of which he devoted to acquiring works of art and objects of antiquarian interest. The seal is of silver, very thick, beautifully executed, and in the finest condition. But this seal is not the most important of its class that has been recovered from the bed of the Thames, for it was once the depository of the Great Seal of England, which James II. obtained possession of on the night of his flight from



" PILGRIMS' SIGNS."

Whitehall, and purposely let fall into the water as he passed down the river. It was afterwards accidentally brought to the surface by a fisherman and restored to the Government.

The water of the Thames was much less polluted in former times than now. As late as 1790 the Thames had, between its source and Woolwich, every species of fish found in British rivers, except the burbot, the lode, and the samlet. The lamprey was at that time a fish of quite national importance, and was taken in amazing quantities between Battersea Reach and Windsor, and sold to the Dutch at the rate of forty shillings per thousand, for the cod and other fisheries; as many as four hundred and fifty thousand

having been sold in one season for that purpose. The fish which came down as low as London Bridge were roach, dace, bleak in great quantity, and eels. A well-known angler, writing on the subject in 1841, says it was not unusual for an expert angler to carry away upwards of twenty dozen fine smelts from angling stations about Blackwall, and relates how he had often taken five or six dozen before eight o'clock in the morning. He likewise recommends the angler to fish under or about the starlings of Battersea, Westminster, and Blackfriars Bridges. So common was the practice of fishing in the river at one time, even below London Bridge, that a waterman, in a boat on the Pool, used to draw attention to the fact of his having live shrimps for sale as bait by ringing a bell. Crooked Lane was then thought to be about the centre of the London angling stations, which accounts for the congrega-

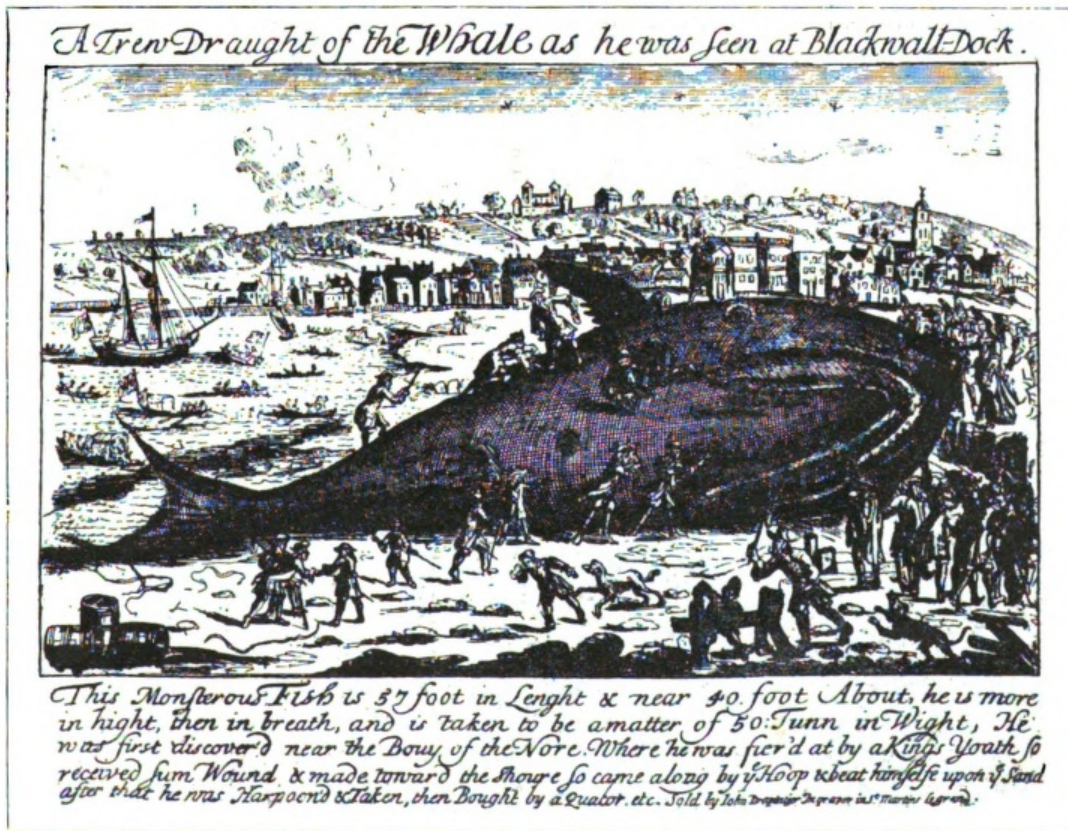
tion of fishing-tackle makers there, which at one time amounted to thirteen in number.

But fish of larger size than those already mentioned sometimes found their way up the river, as we may see by our last illustration, and the members of the angling fraternity would no doubt have been much astonished if by any chance they had happened upon one of these creatures while engaged in their favour-



THE SEAL OF EDWARD II.

ite pastime. Several of these monsters have been known to stray up the river from time to time. In 1759 a kind of grampus, twenty-four feet long, was taken and brought up to Westminster Bridge in a barge. Another of the length of eighteen feet, and thick in proportion to its length, was caught in 1766, and a third, twenty-one feet long, was taken above London Bridge in 1783. The one shown here was caught in the Thames about 1690, and was fifty-seven feet long and forty feet in circumference, and weighed fifty tons.



From an]

THE MONSTER WHALE EXHIBITFD AT BLACKWALL IN 1690.

[Old Print.