



The Vale Meteorites

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Whilst researching for a book about meteorite falls in the British Isles, I tried to obtain some information about the Hatford meteorite of 9 April 1628.

On examination of the website of the UK and Ireland Meteorite Page (<http://atschool.eduweb.co.uk/bookman/meteorites/ENGL.HTM#hatford>), it appears that there are two extant contemporary accounts of the fall, an anonymous pamphlet published later in April 1628 and a letter by a Mr. Hoskins of Wantage to his son-in-law in London. Both accounts assert that two meteorites certainly fell and that there may have been others. The anonymous pamphlet appears to be based on eye-witness accounts from Hatford (51° 39' N, 1° 31' W), 'some eight miles from Oxford'. (The true distance is about 13 miles, or 21 km.) The pamphlet describes a 24-lb (11 kg) meteorite that fell at Bawlkin Green, 'being a mile and a half from Hatford', and also mentions a meteorite that 'was taken up at Letcombe'. This is probably Letcombe Regis (51° 34.5' N, 1° 27' W), 2.2 km SW of Wantage.

Mr. Hoskins, writing from Wantage, says that one stone fell 'at Chalows, half a mile off [from Wantage] and the other 'at Barking, five miles off'. He also says that one stone, which broke up, 'weighed, all the pieces together, six & twenty pounds' and the other stone 'that was taken up in the other place weighed half a tod, 14 pound'. However, he does not specify which stone was which. 'Chalows' is probably East Challow, (about 51° 35.3' N, 1° 27' W), a mile west of Wantage and a mile north of Letcombe Regis.

According to the Catalogue of Meteorites, 'at least three stones fell': the 24 lb (11 kg) Hatford stone, the 26 lb (12 kg) Challow stone, and the 14 lb (6.4 kg) Balking stone. The Hatford stone was clearly the 'Bawlkin Green' stone of the anonymous pamphlet; the Challow stone was the Letcombe stone of the pamphlet and the Chalows stone of Mr. Hoskins's letter; and the Balking stone was Mr. Hoskins's 'Barking' stone. However, my research indicates that 'Bawlkin Green', where the 'Hatford' meteorite fell, is Baulking Green (51° 36' 56" +/- 4"N, 1° 32' 35" +/- 2"W); the green is immediately north of Baulking Church, and 4.6 km (nearly 3 miles) southwest of Hatford. Thus the 'Hatford' meteorite and the 'Balking' meteorite are probably one and the same. If so, the 'Balking' meteorite probably had a total mass of 24-26 lb (11-12 kg), and the 14 lb (6.4 kg) meteorite mentioned by Mr. Hoskins probably fell at East Challow or Letcombe Regis.

Unfortunately, the anonymous pamphlet and Mr. Hoskins's letter appear to be the only surviving contemporary accounts of the meteorite fall. There is no information about what happened to the meteorites afterwards.

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The Anonymous Leaflet

Look up and see a new wonder. The name of the town is Hatford, in Berkshire, some eight miles from Oxford, April 9, 1628, about 5 of the clock in the afternoon. The weather was warm, without any great show of distemperature; a gentle gale of wind from West to N.W.; in an instant was heard first a hideous rumbling in the air, and presently after followed a strange and fearful peal of thunder; it maintained the fashion of a fought battle. It began thus: first, for an onset, went off one great cannon as it were of thunder alone, like a warning-piece to the rest that were to follow. Then, a little while after, was heard a second; until the number of 20 were discharged, or thereabout.

In some little distance of time after this, was audibly heard the sound of a drum, beating a retreat. Amongst all these angry peals shot off from heaven, at the end of the report of every crack, a hissing noise made way through the air, not unlike the flying of bullets from the mouth of great ordnance, and by judgement were thunderbolts; for one of them was seen by many people to fall at a place called Bawlkin Green, being a mile and a half from Hatford; which thunderbolt was by one Mistress Greene caused to be digged out of the ground, she being an eye-witness amongst many others of the manner of the falling.

The form of the stone is three-square, and picked at the end; in colour outwardly blackish, somewhat like iron; crusted over with that blackness about the thickness of a shilling; within it is soft, mixed with some kind of mineral, shining like small pieces of glass. This stone broke in the fall. The whole piece is in weight nineteen pound and a half, the greater piece that fell off weigheth five pound, which, with other small pieces being put together, make four and twenty pound and better. It is in the country credibly reported, that other thunder-stones have been found in other places; but for certainly there was one taken up at Letcombe, and is now in the custody of the sheriff. [9 Y b]

Mr Hoskins's Letter

A Letter of the year 1628, "sent by Mr. John Hoskins, dwelling at Wantage, in Berkshire, to his son-in-law, Mr Dawson, a gun-smith, dwelling in the Minories without Aldgate," and preserved among Nehemiah Wallington's Historical Notices (i. 13) contains the following narration:

On Wednesday before Easter, being the ninth of April, about six of the clock, in the afternoon, there was such a noise in the air, and after such a strange manner, as the oldest man alive never heard the like. And it began as followeth: First, as it were, one piece of ordnance went off alone. Then, after that, a little distance, two more, and then they went as thick as ever I heard a volley of shot in all my life; and after that, as it were the sound of a drum, to the amazement of me, your mother, and a hundred more besides; yet this is not all; but as it is reported, there fell divers stones, but two is certain in our knowledge. The one fell at Chalows, half a mile off, and the other at Barking five miles off. Your mother was at the place where one of them fell knee-deep, till it came at the very rock, and when it came at the hard rock it broke, and being weighed, all the pieces together, six & twenty pounds. The other that was taken up in the other place weighed half a tod, 14 pound.

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