

CORRESPONDENCE.

*To the Editors of 'The Observatory.'**Flamsteed's Well.*

GENTLEMEN,—

A work has recently been published on Greenwich Park by its Superintendent, which exhibits much local knowledge, particularly of the antiquarian remains and coins found in the park. But I must take the liberty of demurring to a statement respecting a well in which Flamsteed is said to have made some observations. We are told (p. 14) that “The site of Flamsteed’s well, into which the great astronomer used to descend in order that more accurate observations could be recorded, has been covered over, but is marked by a wooden post bearing a suitable inscription. The well was of considerable depth (100 feet), with a spiral staircase of 150 steps, and was encased with brick for about three parts of its depth. Observations were taken by the astronomer lying on a mattress and placing his eye to a glass.”

Now certainly if Flamsteed did often place himself in such a position, we need not seek any other cause for the headaches and other ailments of which he so frequently complained. But it is also unnecessary to point out that at the bottom of a shaft of that depth, unless it had a very large opening, it would have been quite impossible to see even γ Draconis, which when on the meridian is about $1\frac{1}{2}'$ distant from the zenith of Greenwich.

With regard to the site of the well, Mr. Maunder remarks, in his work on the Royal Observatory, that its precise position is not now known. In Rees’s ‘Cyclopædia’ it is stated that it was in the south-eastern corner of what is now the garden, behind the observatory. Being desirous of tracing this point if possible, I searched through Airy’s Reports, and in that for 1840 found the following:—

“At the last meeting of the Board, I was desired to procure information relative to the place of Flamsteed’s well. I have communicated on this subject (indirectly) with Mr. Taylor, formerly First Assistant at the Royal Observatory, and with Mrs. Storey, daughter of Dr. Maskelyne. From the former I have received only an expression of full confidence that no such well was ever discovered; by the latter I am assured that such a well was discovered, but was closed so quickly that even Dr. Maskelyne himself did not see it. With regard to the locality, I apprehend that no more certain information can be obtained than that deduced from the accurate plan left by Flamsteed (and published by Mr. Baily in his ‘Account &c. of Flamsteed’), from which it appears to be exactly at the meeting of two walls bounding what are now called the Drying Ground and the Middle Garden.”

The plan in question appears on p. 40 of Baily. The site of the well is indeed marked near the bottom at the right-hand corner, but I know of no record of what use Flamsteed made of it. If it

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be permissible to conjecture, I would suggest that it was *not* deep, and that he thought γ Draconis might be conveniently observed thereby with a plumb-line and zenith sector, as Bradley did long afterwards, and that the plumb-line would be more tranquil in such a position than above ground. Yours faithfully,

Blackheath, 1903, Jan. 8.

W. T. LYNN.

P.S.—With regard to the question in the penultimate paragraph of the Oxford Note-Book in your last number (p. 80), may I say that it appears to me that “*hervortritt*” cannot mean “*rises*,” which would be “*aufgeht*,” and that the nearest English equivalent to the former word would be “*makes its appearance*.”—W. T. L.

[Among a collection of ancient pictures preserved at the Royal Observatory there is a wood-engraving said to have been taken from a copy of Halley’s *Historia Cœlestis*, which shows the well in section, and the quotation from the Superintendent’s book given above is a fairly accurate description of this. Agreeably to Mr. Lynn’s suggestion, there is shown a plumb-line with the bob at the bottom of the well. A man lying on his back seems to be looking upward through the bob.

As to the position of the well, the section just mentioned shows it covered with a small building which appears on other pictures at about the place defined in the Report for 1840, which is at this moment marked as the site of the well. In the summer of the year 1881 there was a subsidence of the ground about this spot and remains of brickwork was seen, leaving little doubt but that there had been an underground construction of some kind here.—Eds.]

A Glance at an old Nautical Almanac.

GENTLEMEN,—

One is so much in the habit of consulting the *Nautical Almanac* for the reduction of present observations and information as to future events that interesting points in the earlier issues are apt to be overlooked.

An occasion for using the *N. A.* for 1800 suggested one or two things which may be worth recalling, though they are doubtless well known to many. Thus the notation in which Celestial Longitudes were then expressed has now a very strange appearance. The angles are given under *four* columns, headed S, D, M, S. Very little inspection is enough to show that the first column is expressed with a unit of 30° ; the others, of course, giving degrees, minutes, and seconds. Apparently the first S stands for Sign of the Zodiac, but further information as to this notation would be interesting. In 1833 the columns are headed S, $^\circ$, $'$, $''$, a return to a still older notation which is found in the *N. A.* for 1767. In 1834 we find the notation with which we are now familiar.

The volume for 1833 gives a list of nineteen errata detected in Taylor’s Logarithms (London, 4to, 1792). As many uncorrected