

On the Approximate Dates of Weyland Smith's Cave and the White Horse of Berkshire

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WEYLAND Smith's cave and the local popular legend that horses were shod there by an invisible smith has been to a large extent rescued from oblivion by Sir Walter Scott, who makes use of the story in his 'Kenilworth,' and still later Judge Hughes has built up a fascinating story with much local colour, 'The Scouring of the White Horse,' on the White Horse and adjacent barrow, though his archæology will not bear the criticism of modern knowledge.

There can be no doubt of the intimate connection of the White Horse and the so-called Weyland Smith's Cave, and the much greater antiquity of the former than legendary lore assigns to it. The popular idea is that the horse is the memorial of a Saxon victory over the Danes in a battle fought in the immediate vicinity in the time of Alfred the Great, *i.e.* not later than the 8th century. Weyland Smith's so-called cave is a chambered dolmen of the long barrow type, now partially unroofed, carefully oriented, with an entrance to the south, and chambers east and west. The displaced roofing stones of the entrance and western chamber lie on the ground close by. The dolmen belongs to the Long Barrow type, and other examples exist at West Kennet, Wiltshire, Gloucestershire, New Grange, near Drogheda, and elsewhere. The stones were covered by earth, leaving a passage into the interior, and generally were bounded on the outside by a ring of upright stones and a ditch and vallum. This form of barrow was built by a dolicho-cephalic people who buried their dead. This race also had the art of potting, and used flint tools of a Neolithic pattern. I obtained some finished hammers, thumb scrapers, and numerous flint flakes from the area of the dolmen and the fields in its immediate vicinity.

It is possible, therefore to assign a fairly definite limit to the date of the building of Weyland Smith's Cave, *i.e.* it is not earlier than the Neolithic time or more recent than the Bronze period, and for our present purpose it is this date which is of the most critical importance.

Long Barrows are earlier in date than Round Barrows, and it is in the latter only that weapons of bronze have been found. The evidence shows that bronze came into use in Western Europe about 4,000 years ago, so that the date of the building of the dolmen is at least 2,000 years B.C. The date of the commencement of the Neolithic period is more obscure, and according to some may go back to 10,000 B.C. The cave or dolmen, therefore, was far more ancient than the White Horse, and was a sacred high place on the hills, held in great reverence and awe as the home of the departed spirits of the mighty dead.

From the careful way in which these ancient tombs were oriented, sun worship must have been in vogue. The setting and rising of the sun gave to early man the idea of regeneration and a future life, and the sun was naturally worshipped as the author of all life, food and comfort, and indeed the orientation of churches and the turning to the east at the recitation of the Creed by Christians has been adopted directly from sun worship, and is a custom of untold antiquity.

When the legend of the white horses which drew the chariot of the sun first arose is impossible to state with any approach to accuracy. The legend is well known in classic mythology, and it is also met with in Norse Sagas. In the latter we have the myth of the sun horse, a white steed called Granie, ridden by Sigurd, and shod by Wieland the Smith God. This gives us the connection between the White Horse and the myth which has arisen in connection with the dolmen.

Wieland the Smith God, the idea of the faculty of creative art, also met with in Genesis as Tubalcain, the father of all who work in brass and iron. The story runs that, while asleep after a heavy meal of bear's flesh, Wieland was surprised and bound by the Niding, who crippled him by hamstringing and made him work at a forge hidden away underground. In captivity he begot Widonga, god of perpetual growth of woods and meadows. So he worked and

forged 700 year rings, and was deserted at length by his wife Hervor. Then he escaped, killing his captors, and was transformed into a bird. Note the parallel story of Sampson.

I think that it may therefore be assumed as a fact that the pre-bronze age dolmen was long anterior to the legend of Weyland, the smith, the metal worker, and also that the dolmen was on the hill long before the White Horse was cut, and that the latter was made by a people who were Norse in race and had the ideas and beliefs that have come down to us in the Eddas. Wieland was a metal worker, and therefore probably must be assigned to the Bronze or Iron age, probably 500 to 1500 B.C.

Probably the sequence was as follows:—Invasion by Norse worshippers of Woden, Thor, and the northern gods, utterly ignorant of the Long Barrow builders, long passed into oblivion. Discovery of a traditional sacred mound where sun worship had been carried on, with an underground passage and a secret chamber, which they assumed to be the working place of Wieland. To complete the story, the galloping white horse of the sun, Granie, was carved out of the turf close by the mythical underground forge, so that the legendary smith could shoe him daily with the shoes made in the secret cavern.

It is of the greatest interest that the idea of the legendary smith and his forge and his proper name have been handed down so carefully by local folk for so many thousand years. We see here the implantation of a Bronze Iron age Norse myth on an earlier Neolithic cult, which is parallel to what took place on the introduction of Christianity, when the earlier religious feasts and holy days, sacred places and signs, were adopted as far as possible to the newer religion for very obvious reasons. To give one example, Eostra, the goddess of spring, whose spring festival, with egg rolling, was adopted with name unchanged for one of the most important commemorative feasts of the Christian Church, and Christmas Day is another, with its Norse mistletoe and holly. Balder the Good, a prototype of Christ, was dying, *i.e.* the sun was getting lower and lower in the heavens as winter approached. His mother, in an effort to save her son, went round to all living things and asked them to protect and not injure her son, Balder the Good. But she forgot the mistletoe, that

wonderful mystic plant without roots or flowers, and bright green in the winter. The spirit of evil, Logi, noted this omission, and made an arrow of mistletoe wood, and put it in the hands of a blind man and told him to shoot at a deer, which he warned him would soon pass by. As Balder passed he ordered him to shoot, and Balder was wounded and died. All nature wept and the tears became the white berries of the mistletoe, and as Balder's blood dropped it formed the red berries of the holly.

Popular legend, however, has clothed with romance the truncated conical Hill, carved out of the lower chalk and the coombe or water worn hollow near the base of the escarpment, and given them respectively the names of the Dragon's Hill and the Horse's Manger, and thus elaborating the Sun myth. Both Hill and Gorge are natural features due to water action. Springs coming out at the base of the chalk have cut off the Dragon's Hill and excavated the little gorge. This legend is, of course, parallel to that of St. George and the dragon. The Sun (St. George) slays the Dragon (night), and rescues the beautiful maiden (the Earth). This connection with the Dragon strengthens and completes the identification of the White Horse of the Berkshire Downs with Granie the White Horse of the Sun-God.

Thus each piece of Folk-lore, each legend, every festival and holy day, has a foundation of historic fact, and this is specially true on all matters which have been held as sacred by our long-forgotten forebears and ancestors. Thankful must we be when, as in the case of Weyland Smith's Cave, local tradition has kept alive so faithfully a piece of ancient history of such enthralling interest.

But the dolmen and the White Horse are not the only relics of bygone races which occurs at Uffington. The large camp of Uffington Castle, in close proximity to the White Horse, must be considered in connection both with Weyland Smith's Cave and the White Horse itself, and this opens up the wide question of the date and purpose of those structures. Numbers of these so-called camps occur all over the British Isles, and are known as camps, rings, burys and castles, and up to the present the general concensus of opinion has been that they were built for defensive purposes, and were altogether military in character. But from an examination of

a very large number of them of all sizes, both in England, Ireland and Scotland, I cannot accept that view for many of them. The camps are always on the top of a hill, and therefore could be easily surrounded and the garrison starved out. In many cases the ground inside the vallum slopes considerably to the summit, and would give no cover for man or his flocks. Once shut up within the ring, there are no available possibilities of retreat. For military purposes the so-called camps are too conspicuous and are easily overlooked. Many of them are not on the highest point of the range and could be easily attacked along the ridge.

Perhaps the most striking criticism is that the large majority of the camps are waterless, and could have had no possible water supply inside the precincts of the ramp and ditch. So many camps of this sort are found on the waterless chalk downs, and that is why there have never been any settlements in their vicinity. Dew ponds have been suggested as a water supply. But I consider that source would have been totally inadequate for the large area of the enclosures.

The ditches and ramps are often multiple, but they are too deep for defensive purposes. Men in the trench could not see over the top. Neither could they retreat to their second trench or into the camp, for the ramp is too high for them to climb quickly with an eager foe at their heels. The essentials of military science are much the same to-day as they always have been, and one of the first things that would be noted is the large number of defenders that would be necessary to hold and garrison a camp of this description, and in several the ditch is inside the outer ring.

One must remember, too, in those old days combats were always hand to hand, and antagonists were always within sling, spear or bow-shot distance, and were visible to each other. In such a case, to defend the camp the warriors must have manned the crest and not the ditch, and the ditch behind them would have been a death-trap.

A comparison of the siting of these hill camps with Roman military camps will at once show that they are constructed for totally different objects. One rarely finds a Roman camp on a hill top unless to guard a line of road, and as a rule isolated spots were not chosen. It is true that in some

camps, *e.g.* Danebury, Maiden Newton, Yarnbury, and others, the entrances are very complicated, the approach apparently defended.

A large number of the smaller camps have only one entrance, and that is generally due east. It is so in the small Irish raths; but the large ones have generally two entrances. There is no doubt that the building of the ramp and the excavating of the ditch represents an enormous amount of labour, and that there must have been some great public reason for their construction. The most powerful stimulus for the building of these camps must, I think, have been one of three which I enumerate below, and which I tabulate in a diminishing order of importance:—

(a) Self-preservation or military, which I have already shown from the nature of the place may be set aside.

(b) Religion. When we look down the vista of past centuries, one cannot help being struck by the enormous amount of building and constructive work that has been done with a religious object. In many cases religion is even stronger than the impulse of self-preservation, for man, from the earliest ages, has believed in the future life, and that belief has led him to voluntarily sacrifice his present existence and wealth to insure his future and eternal happiness. The careful orientation of the entrances of these camps has led me to suspect that they were holy or sacred places, probably, in their earlier conception, used for the worship of the sun and the heavenly bodies. I am quite persuaded that the stone circles were made for this purpose. The ramparts and ditches were, I believe, not for defence, but marked a line of taboo, and the camp was thus a sacred enclosure, largely resorted to for festivals and sacrificial rites, or the internal ditch may have been used for ceremonial marches and processions or even, as suggested by some, as shelter for a circle of rude huts, as is the practice of some African tribes to-day.

(c) The third motive for the construction of some of the camps may have been trade, or trade may have followed religious occupation, when owing to the habit of going to worship, the locality had been sanctified and made safe, so that possibly hostile tribes might be able to meet there, for barter, in safety. Custom and tradition both bear witness that such was the case at the White Horse camp. Judge

Hughes has fortunately left us an account of the scouring of the White Horse, with its fair and large concourse of peoples, and it is much to be regretted that this local festival was ever allowed to fall into disuse.

The Tan Hill fair is another similar case, and is held annually on August 6th in a so-called camp on the Marlborough downs. There is another association between a fair and a camp at Yarnbury, in South-west Wilts, where an annual fair is held on October 4th.

In this connection it is interesting to note the wakes of some North-Midland towns still kept up as an annual holiday. The wakes are really the octaves of the patron saints of the parish church. Owing to the influx of outlying parishioners, accommodation had to be made for the refreshment of the worshippers, and booths were set up in the vicinity of the church for this purpose, and also for the sale of religious offerings. Special cakes were made for the occasion, and these are still in vogue.

Fairs are of great antiquity, and were held by Royal licence, which was a guarantee for the safety of sellers and buyers and their merchandise. Without this idea of safety no tribes could possibly trade with each other.

A large number of camps have the word 'bury,' sometimes as an affix, as Danebury, Sidbury; sometimes as a prefix as Bury Bank, Bury Ring. This word is not to be confused with barrow or burying place, though no doubt there is a definite connection between them. Bury is the burgh or borough, and probably is not nearly so old as the places which are now known by it. Given by a later race than the builders, it merely expresses their theory of the object and uses of the camps and rings. We have the affix in all the places ending in 'by,' *e.g.* Derby, which merely indicates a Danish settlement.

Many of the camps are found in close proximity to ancient roads, which until quite recent dates were used by cattle drovers. These ways generally consist of a sunken road with a low ramp on either side. One of the best-known ways is the Ridgeway, which passes immediately south of Uffington Castle. This way is probably one of the oldest east and west routes in the kingdom, and is probably Neolithic in date. As to the date of Uffington Castle there is very little

direct evidence, but the fields in the vicinity are strewn with chipped flakes of Neolithic age. I have, however, picked out chipped flints from the fosse at Sidbury and Danebury, and within the outer circle of Old Sarum. This, I think, points to the occupation of these circles in Neolithic times and probably the camps and the ways, including the Ridgeway, were built by the same peoples, but this gives one an approximate date only, from 10000 to 2000 B.C.

Some more definite evidence might be obtained by a little judicious excavation near the entrances of the camps. A section across ditches and ramps might unearth pottery and implements which would indicate a more definite date and fix the stage of culture which the builders had reached.

At present I am inclined to think that the camps and roads and the Long Barrow belong to the same period, Neolithic and pre-Bronze, and that the White Horse and the Weyland Smith legend is much later and may belong to the Bronze or Iron age, say between 1500 B.C. and 700 A.D.

This small part of Berkshire, therefore, carries us back through a very long vista of prehistoric times, and probably still is guarding jealously many secrets which careful and persistent investigation may one day bring to light.

A Survey of Wallingford in 1550

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(Continued from Vol. 23, No. 2, page 64.)

Fish Street, east side (*continued*).

- (10) Ralph Polhampton holds there one tenement [free, 1561] with garden adjacent, called Glasiers, in length 106 ft. and in breadth 38 ft., formerly Elizabeth Polhampton's, and he pays per annum *iiij*s., *xij*d. [freely, 1561].
- (11) The same Ralph holds another tenement there, called Osgotes, with garden adjacent, in length 52 ft. and in breadth 20 ft., formerly in the tenure