

ANCIENT EARTHWORKS IN EPPING FOREST.

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THE object of these notes is to record a few facts and a few observations respecting certain antiquarian remains in Epping Forest, belonging to a remote period of our history. The remains in question have in part continued wholly unnoticed until quite recently, and in part have not received the attention their importance calls for. They comprise two earthworks, which form encampments, and certain banks between the camps. For the sake of brevity, this paper will summarily indicate what the writer has seen rather than what he has read. The discussion of the simple facts will be left to better archæologists than the writer professes to be.

In a paper read before the Royal Archaeological Institute in November, 1875, I gave a cursory account of the circumstances under which I discovered, in 1872, the existence of an unregistered earthwork in Epping Forest, to the north-west of Loughton, and to the east of the Epping road. The same paper contained a general description of the said earthwork. Since then the notes have been published in the Transactions of the Institute, along with a plan from a survey executed by W. D'Oyley, Esq., of Loughton, who very cheerfully undertook that task. Subsequent examinations of the locality have brought to light a few new and interesting facts.

The Loughton camp consists of an irregular circle, comprising, wherever practicable, an outer trench and an inner embankment, formed of the materials from the trench. This inclosure is nearly 800 yards in its outer circumference, and it occupies the headland of an elevated plateau, overlooking a deep valley on the south,¹ and a smaller branch valley on

¹ The deep valley on the south of the camp seems to have been called Debden, as a flat open morass in it, which is pro-

bably the site of an ancient lake, is known as Debden Slade. The name Debden also occurs on the right of the road from

the west. The view on the southern side is very extensive, and is bounded by the Kentish hills beyond the Thames. High Beech lies not far away to the west.

Round the northern section of the camp there are many pits, mostly of ancient date, hidden by the forest, and apparently forming part of a general plan; they are continued to the head of the smaller western valley. There are also two large old pits in the inclosure, not far from a point on the western curve where the outwork seems to have been tumbled down the slope towards the valley below.² The face of the steep declivity on the west and south shows traces of an entrenchment and other excavations. The crest of the ridge on the other side of the western valley has also been cut so as to destroy the natural slope. The first published plan does not show this last work, and it likewise fails to indicate all the pits on the north-west, and the subordinate trenches below the brow of the camp-hill. These details have, in fact, only come to light since the last year's survey was made.

As the camp and its surroundings are overgrown and covered with vegetation in summer, the place is only open to full inspection in winter and the early spring. There is, however, always enough to be seen to show the character and general outline of these ancient remains. The vicinity on the south-west is in some maps called Turpin's cave, though no cave is there. I am unable to account for this appropriation of the famous highwayman's name. In some parts the embankment of the camp has been much dug into and injured by persons endeavouring to unearth the foxes which took possession of this lonely spot. It is worthy of notice that the camp has been so planned as to intersect a small valley which originates within the enclosure, and drains it on the south-east. During the winter, this little valley is the bed of a spring of water, so that by including it a constant water supply could be secured.

Without dwelling further upon this recent addition to the list of Essex antiquities, I observe that it lies only about two

Loughton to the Wake Arms. Debden, *i.e.* Deep Dene, of course means a deep valley, and Slade signifies a low-lying boggy place. As these words are not modern it may be as well to note their occurrence in this locality.

² A civil engineer who has inspected these pits is of opinion that they were intended to contain water, but they are dry now, which is not the case with some of those outside the enclosure.

miles south of Ambresbury Bank, which is a quadrangular earthwork, and also in the forest. The proximity of these two camps naturally suggested a relationship between them, and the probable existence of traces of ancient occupation in the intermediate space. The results of repeated search show that these conjectures may not be without confirmation. But at present we may proceed at once to Ambresbury Bank, and see what that is.

The pedestrian may pursue a pleasant route through one of the most romantic portions of the forest. Let us then journey northwards, across the plateau, through Little Monkwood, over a deep valley, and through Great Monkwood—names which will remind us of the venerable Abbey of Waltham on the other side of the western hill. We emerge near the keeper's lodge upon the ancient road through Loughton to Epping. It will be best not to tempt the forest again here, so we follow the road past the Wake Arms and towards Epping. Ere long we come to a road branching to the left, and leading by the old foundation known as Copped or Copt Hall, and to Waltham Holy Cross. Upon our right we see a white post, which the Corporation of London has fixed as a parish boundary, and close at hand is Ambresbury Bank.

This camp has been long known, but very much neglected, although both interesting and important as an ancient remnant.³ It is quadrangular, and for that reason may be assigned to another race than that which formed the Loughton Camp. The irregular circular contour of the latter contrasts remarkably with the straighter lines and the positive angles of the former. I suppose the Ambresbury Bank to be Roman, or the result of Roman inspiration. What the other is I leave to practical archæologists to determine; but possibly the local association of Ambresbury or Amesbury with Queen Boadicea ought to be transferred to the Loughton camp. Of the name Ambresbury, I shall have a word to say before I conclude, but propose now to attempt a slight description of the place.

³ There are notices of it, I believe, in some of the books which relate to the topography of Essex, such as that of Morant (*"History and Antiquities of Essex."* London, 1768). I am told that a plan of it occurs in Elizabeth Osborne's *"Essex,"* vol. i. (London, 1814.) Am-

bresbury is also indicated in most, but not all of the maps of the region and county. The name *"Boadicea's Camp"* is sometimes given to the Ambresbury Bank, and there is a tradition or legend that the British queen met her death in the neighbourhood.

Those portions of Ambresbury Bank which are almost perfect, exhibit a deep and broad moat, with a strong inner embankment, and a slighter external one. Two of the angles point very nearly north and south. The plan is not a regular square, but an irregular quadrangle, the shorter sides being those between the north and east, the east and south, and the south and west; the remaining and longer side has an obvious outward curve. There are various entrances, and there have been, I think, two at least on every side. The southern angle is least perfect, and was probably never closed, and all the other angles are slightly rounded. At what we may term the southern angle (towards the west), the work is so arranged as to inclose part of a low-lying strip of ground adjacent to a water-course, the intention probably being to ensure a water-supply on the inside, and a ditch on the outside. The whole of the interior, and part of the exterior is more or less wooded,—densely so on the south-west and south, where an ordinary visitor will be very likely to overlook the bank, which is carried through the swamp. The entire area comprises about twelve acres, according to Mr. D'Oyley, who has been good enough to survey it, and it is as nearly as possible of the same extent as the camp at Loughton.

It is to be regretted that very recently as well as formerly, the Ambresbury Camp has been greatly disfigured by Essex Vandals, and in some parts almost obliterated by seekers for sand and other materials. The timber also has suffered considerably. But still we have a well-defined and strongly defended entrenchment. Outside the enclosure on the east the surface is irregular, but I have not explored it enough to say more than that the irregularity seems not wholly due to common gravel and sand diggers, whose doings are for the most part easily identified.

We may now refer to the common local name of this camp, which is Ambresbury or Amesbury, and is exactly identical with that of a well-known town in Wiltshire, with its neighbouring Stonehenge and Vespasian's Camp. They say that Ambresbury is named after Ambrosius Aurelius, a celebrated opposer of the Saxons. If this is right, the Epping Camp is associated with the most romantic period of our history, and may conjure up visions of Vortigern and Arthur, and Merlin, and a host of other legendary heroes.

Though tempted to enlarge on such a theme, I restrain my pen, and only ask how Ambresbury Bank came by its actual name. If Ambrosius formed it, Boadicea knew nothing of it; though if he only occupied it, she may have known it. History does not aid us, though curiously enough the name of Ambresbury in Wiltshire figures once along with that of Waltham in our national chronicles. Giraldus Cambrensis (Bk. 1, Ch. 7), and Gervase of Canterbury both tell in consecutive sentences, how Henry II. removed the monks of Waltham, and the nuns of Ambresbury, and put others in their places. This juxtaposition is curious, because Waltham is so near the Epping camp or Ambresbury Bank.⁴

There still remains one subject to be noticed, and that relates to what lies between the Loughton and Epping camps. Journeying southwards from Ambresbury Bank to Theydon Bois road, the ground has been so dug over for sand, &c., that any ancient work must have been obliterated. But between the Theydon road and that to Loughton I have found a few noticeable features. The first is a short straight embankment running east and west; beyond this is a second and somewhat longer bank running parallel with it. At right angles to this second, and almost touching it, is a third bank lying north and south. Still further south, where the

⁴ The following are the actual words of Giraldus Cambrensis, who is speaking of the way in which Henry fulfilled his vow to found three monasteries in lieu of a certain pilgrimage:—"Canonicos apud Waltham, ab antiquo singulariter et Sancte Deo servientes, in conventualem communemque vitam et regulam regale potestate redegit. Moniales de Ambresbury, hoc est de Ambrosii curia, antiquitus plantatas extirpavit, et alias, id est transmarinas, de fonte Ebrardi violenter intrusit." Hereupon the editor of the London edition of 1846 has these notes:—"See Hoveden, f. 320. A.D. 1177. It is but fair to give another version of these proceedings, such as is put forth by Gervase of Canterbury, whose words are these: "King Henry being at Windsor, sent Richard, Archbishop of Canterbury, Gilbert, Bishop of London, Geoffrey, Bishop of Ely, to Holy Cross Church, Waltham. He had purposed to settle there regular canons, because the seculars who still remained had abandoned themselves to carnal works and unlawful pleasures instead of devoting themselves to God's service. So the dean of the

aforsaid church, whose name was Guido Ruffus, resigned his deanery into the hands of the archbishop. Then the king commanded a new church to be built there, with its offices, and some months after ordered canon regulars to take possession of the ancient church, six from Cirencester, six from Osney, four from Chichester. He sent also, Bartholomew, Bishop of Exeter, and Roger, Bishop of Worcester, to the Abbey of Ambresbury, to eject the abbess and her nuns, convicted for incontinence (de manifesto lenocinio), and introduced in their room the religious from St. Evreux."—Twysden, X., Script. 1434. With regard to the spelling of Ambresbury as Almesbury I say nothing, as it is a philological question, whereas our business is with legends and traditions, and popular stories, and besides I have not found what may be called the Tennysonian form of the name applied to our Epping Forest Camp. It may be well to notice that the country people near Epping call their encampment, not only Ambresbury, but Amesbury—"for short," as an old habitué of the forest observed.

forest is dense and the surface irregular, after crossing a narrow valley, I have met with a ridge running east and west, overgrown with trees, and not like the others in construction. Thus far we have lighted upon four short banks, and having regard to their position and forms, may I not suggest that the three first on the north belong to Ambresbury, and that the one on the south belongs to the Loughton camp? The peculiarity of these small works is my reason or apology for attaching importance to them. If this locality is further examined, and it is impossible to do it thoroughly in the summer, perhaps something more may be discovered.

Although I have rambled over the greater part of Epping Forest in search of archæological traces I have found very few of a definite character beyond those above indicated. Those which have most excited my curiosity are in the vicinity of the Loughton works, a little to the east, and may perhaps yield certain results hereafter. At present I am not justified in speaking decidedly about them.

It will be apparent that in the foregoing notes I have not aimed at more than a brief record of what I have seen; but this may serve to stimulate to a further investigation. I may be permitted in conclusion to observe that Essex is full of early historical memories, and that the same is true of the parts of Hertfordshire which are adjacent. Britons, Romans, and Saxons were very busy in those quarters, and the district was traversed by Roman roads in various directions. One of these roads seems to have passed from Stratford northwards, very near to both the camps which form the subject of this paper. That such camps should be found in a forest is anything but strange. To whatever periods they belong, they must be classed with the more curious and venerable monuments of the county. The preservation of the forest will fortunately secure them from further perils, and they will henceforth suffer only from the slow operations of time. Being easily reached from the metropolis, to which they lie so near, they will no doubt receive from Archæologists the attention they merit.