

KING'S STANDING, ASHDOWN FOREST

By C. F. Tebbutt, F.S.A.

This well-known landmark and view point on Ashdown Forest (TQ. 474301), stands at 680 feet OD. and is planted with Scots Fir. However it differs from the other hill-top plantations on the Forest by being enclosed in a square enclosure instead of a round one. The surrounding bank and outside ditch confine an area 40 x 40 yards. Unfortunately in 1972 much of the bank was levelled and bulldozed into the ditch by the Forest Conservators in ignorance of its historical significance. In the course of this levelling, particularly on the S side, a great many broken plain roof tiles, Tudor type bricks and some 16th- to 17th-century pottery were revealed.

In 1929 Mr. I. D. Margary had a series of air photographs taken of the Forest. These show that the Kings Standing earthwork seems to form a part of, and is at the W end of, a number of much larger faintly marked enclosures (see Fig. 1). However, it may be that the earthwork is probably of later date than the enclosures in which it stands, as its W bank appears to have replaced part of the W bank and ditch of the enclosure.

These large enclosures, totalling about 19 acres, have all been examined on the ground, although some are now hidden in dense gorse and parts have been obliterated since 1929, probably by 1939-45 war activities. In the main, however, they are all still traceable as faint banks with outside ditches. Probing with a steel bar in a number of places suggests that the average ditch was 9 feet wide at the top with a rounded bottom dug to 2 feet below the present surface. The banks were 6 feet across at the base and now seldom rise above 6 inches. The plan (Fig. 1) is based on the air photographs and field work on the ground.

Soon after the photographs were taken some trenches were dug across the earthwork by Mr. I. D. Margary.¹ He found in the upper levels, and in the ditch, bricks, tiles and Medieval pottery. Lower down were signs of Roman and prehistoric occupation. In his article he refers to some derelict banks of fairly modern type clearly traceable quite near to Kings Standing. These are obviously the banks of the large enclosures referred to by me above, and I agree with Mr. Margary that their straight sides and square shapes make it most unlikely that they are of prehistoric origin.

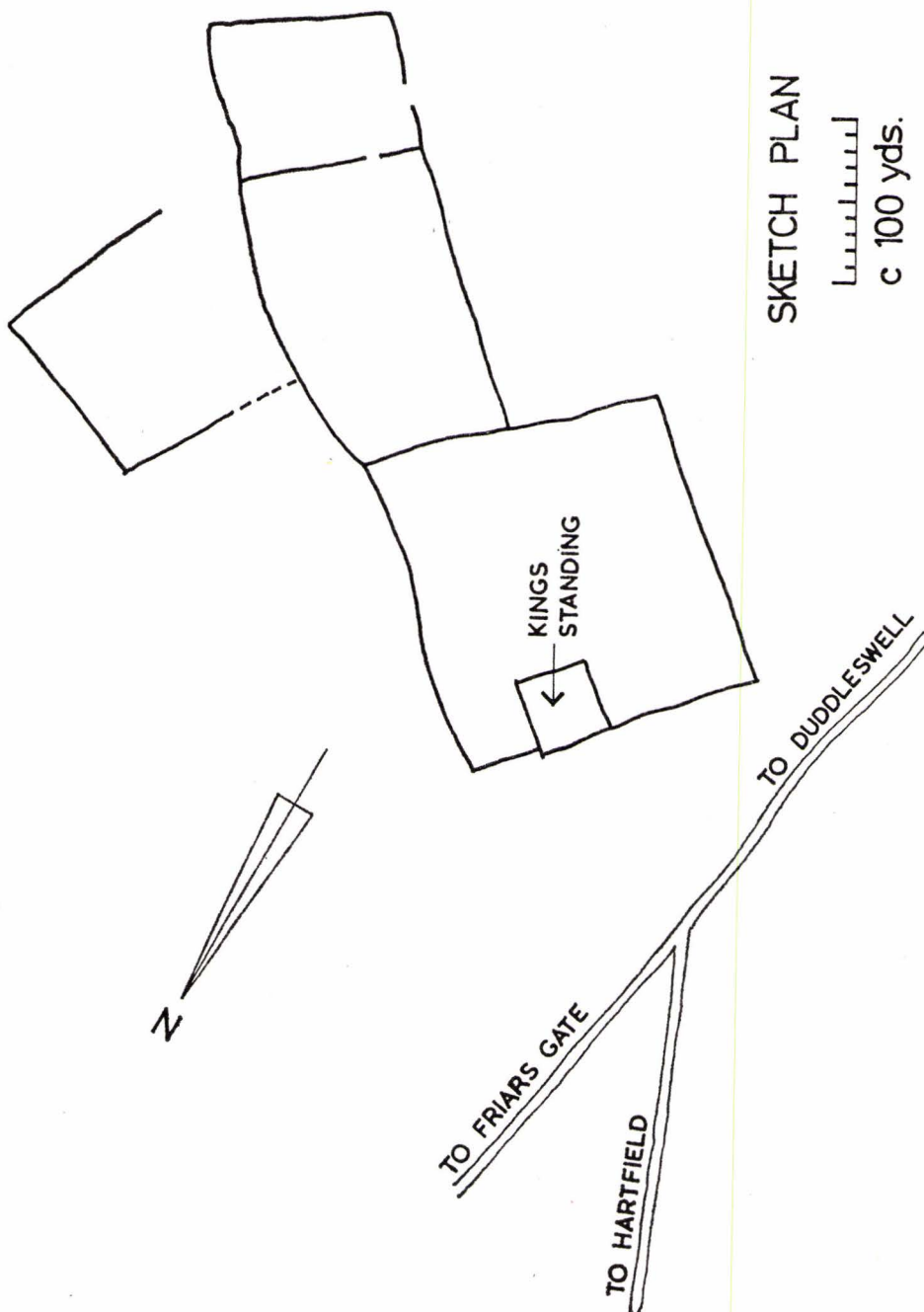
Mr. Margary also refers to the antiquity of the place-name rendered as *Kinges Stand* in 1693, and *King James Stand* in 1813. The popular local belief as to the purpose of the site is expressed by Garth Christian.² He says:

"It was during these visits (to Nutley hunting lodge) if local traditions are to be believed, that he (Edward II) paused on high ground north of Duddleswell while herds of deer were driven before him, hence the name Kings Standing—the hunters' station from which to shoot game. Variations of this tale involve other monarchs."

The present author hopes to show that the story is at least partly true, but unlikely to apply to any monarch before the Tudors.

¹ *Sussex Notes and Queries*, vol. 3 (1931), 72-6.

² *Ashdown Forest*, Friends of Ashdown Forest (1967), 12.



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It was this background that led me to try to find out more about Medieval and post Medieval deer hunting methods to determine the purpose of the Kings Standing site and its possible relationship to the adjoining enclosures.

Medieval and later hunting practice is perhaps most authentically described in that magnificent work *The Master of the Game*¹. In the editors' Appendix we read:—

"Medieval hunters did not use the crossbow in general to anything like the same extent as did their successors, say from the end of the 16th century, when firearms came into general use and the slaughter of vast numbers of stags and other game became not only the fashion but was the object of personal rivalry among the governing classes. . . . Before the adoption of gunpowder for the chase the taking of a single animal was by pursuing it, either on foot or on horseback, with slow but carefully trained hounds, the final killing of the beast, when brought to bay, being generally done with the spear or hunting knife at often dangerously close quarters. . . . The longer the chase lasted, the rougher the ground, the denser the forest, the wider the rivers, the greater was the test of the skill and endurance of man, horse and hound."²

It would seem that with the coming of the Tudors the style of hunting changed. Monarchs and their companions were no longer willing, or perhaps able, to endure the rigours of the chase to secure a single beast, but preferred a greater slaughter in comfortable surroundings.

Even in the 15th century an alternative to the chase was sometimes practised. This is described in *The Master of the Game* under the heading "The Manner of Hunting when the King will hunt in Forests or in Parks"³

" and then the Master Forester or Parker ought to show him the Kings Standing, and remain there, without noise, until the King comes: and the groom that keeps the King's dogs and broken greyhounds should be there with him and the Master of the Game should be informed by the Forester, or Parker what game the King should find within the set;⁴ and when all this is done then should the Master of the Game mount upon his horse and meet the King and bring him to his standing and tell him what game is within the set, and how the greyhounds be set, and also their stables,⁵ and also to tell him where it is best for him to stand with his bows and his greyhounds. For it is to be known that the attendants of his chamber, and the Queen, should be best placed, and the two Fewterers⁶ ought to make fair lodges of green boughs at the tryste to keep the King and Queen, and ladies and gentlewomen, and also the greyhounds from the sun and bad weather."

So much for a description of a late Medieval deer drive, but the editors of *The Master of the Game* give the following description of a deer drive in Tudor or Stuart times:—

"The game was put up within an enclosed area by harriers or teasers. The sportsmen had trysts or stands allotted to them where they could shoot as deer came by, also at each stand a man seemed to have stood with greyhounds to let slip at his master's orders to course such deer as he thought fit, and some of the wounded deer were chased by harthounds. . . . It was this kind of sport that seems gradually to have gained popularity and ousted the real wild deer hunting of the Normans from its premier place. It was not until the decay of chivalry that this kind of battue, or driving, reached its zenith, and it was in the middle of the 16th, and during the 17th, centuries that shooting in parks was the sport *par excellence*."

It is evident, from the above quotations, that a "standing" was some kind of structure where the hunter could stand, hidden from driven game. There is also the impression that it was raised above the ground. Dr. Johnson in his *Dictionary*⁷ gives as examples of standings "a structure on a battlement" and "a place from which to view a coming-in-state." Again there is recorded the death of Lord Falkland, after breaking a leg by a fall from a standing, while hunting with the king in Theobalds Park in 1633.⁸

From the above evidence regarding Tudor and Stuart hunting methods and the use of "standings" and enclosures to hold the deer, instead of surrounding them with men and dogs, it seems more than likely that the enclosures on Ashdown Forest, adjoining Kings Standing, were constructed to hold deer ready for hunting or shooting, and into which they were either driven,

¹ *Edward, 2nd Duke of York* (1406-13), ed. W. A. and F. Baillie Grohman (1904).

² *Ibid.*, p. 119.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

⁴ The "set" is that quarter of the forest around which were "set" men and hounds to enclose the deer.

⁵ "Stables," another name for "standing".

⁶ Fewterers were men who loosed greyhounds.

⁷ Sixth edition, 1785.

⁸ *Public Record Office S. P. Dom*, Sept. 27, 1633.

or perhaps more likely, enticed by feeding. F. J. Taylor Page describes and figures a very similar set of enclosures at Wet Sleddale, used to catch deer by the monks of Shap Abbey, and called the Buck Park.¹ Indeed this sort of trap almost certainly had a double use, as Royal Forests had to supply large quantities of venison for the King's household, apart from hunting.

Taylor Page also quotes, from a contemporary source, a description of a hunting party at Windsor, at which Queen Elizabeth entertained the Duke of Wurtemberg. Deer were driven from one fenced enclosure to another and shot, at close range, with crossbow and arquebus.

Finally I would refer to an illustrated article entitled *How The Deer Parks Began*, by John Patten.² In this he traces the evolution of the Medieval hunting forest into the Elizabethan deer park, and the "standing" or bower into the Jacobean hunting tower or deercote. Such a hunting tower, with its adjoining securely fenced paddocks, in which deer graze, taken from Blome's *Gentlemen's Recreation*, is used to illustrate the article.

From all the above evidence I would submit that at Kings Standing, on Ashdown Forest, there is the site of a late Medieval "standing" (bower or tryst) together with the enclosures into which the deer were enticed; to be released in front of the "standing" at royal hunts, and perhaps also fattened for the table. Later, in Jacobean times, as evidenced by the bricks and tiles found, a hunting tower was built, according to the prevailing fashion, to replace the "standing".

¹ 'The catching-up and handling of deer in ancient times,' see *Deer*, Journal of the British Deer Soc., 2 (1971), 661-4.

² *Country Life*, Sept. 16, 1971, 660-2