

# A TRIPLE-BANKED ENCLOSURE ON CHOBHAM COMMON.

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THE excavation of even a small earthwork is not only a costly proceeding, but it calls for considerable skill and knowledge, and it is not everyone who can afford the expense of such an undertaking. Yet those who are interested in this branch of archæology can further the study of it by recording and making careful plans of the earthworks in their neighbourhood, especially those which hitherto have been overlooked. In the *Victoria County History of Surrey*<sup>1</sup> there is a reference to a small rectangular enclosure on Chobham Common, which was marked on the early six-inch Ordnance Survey, but is omitted in the present edition.<sup>2</sup> It lies on a gentle slope in a fold of the open common, 12 yards to the west of the western boundary fence of the grounds of Childown Hall, at the point where it makes a slight turn to the north, and is just 1,000 ft. north of the gateway in the fence going to Childown Farm.

It may be said at once that the enclosure has no military position and was certainly not made for any warlike purpose. Some two or three hundred yards to the south of it the ground stands at 120 ft. above sea-level; just outside its south-eastern angle it is about 115 ft., and from this point the whole area of the enclosure is commanded. The ground then slopes gently down to about 105 ft. outside the North-Western angle; and 60 yards further on, in a north-westerly direction, just

<sup>1</sup> *V.C.H.*, Surrey, Vol. IV., p. 403.

<sup>2</sup> O.S., 6-inch, Surrey, 10 S.E.

below the 100 ft. contour, the reeds and rushes and the feathery cotton-grass proclaim the marsh which is the feeder of a tiny stream that eventually finds its way into the Addlestone Bourne.

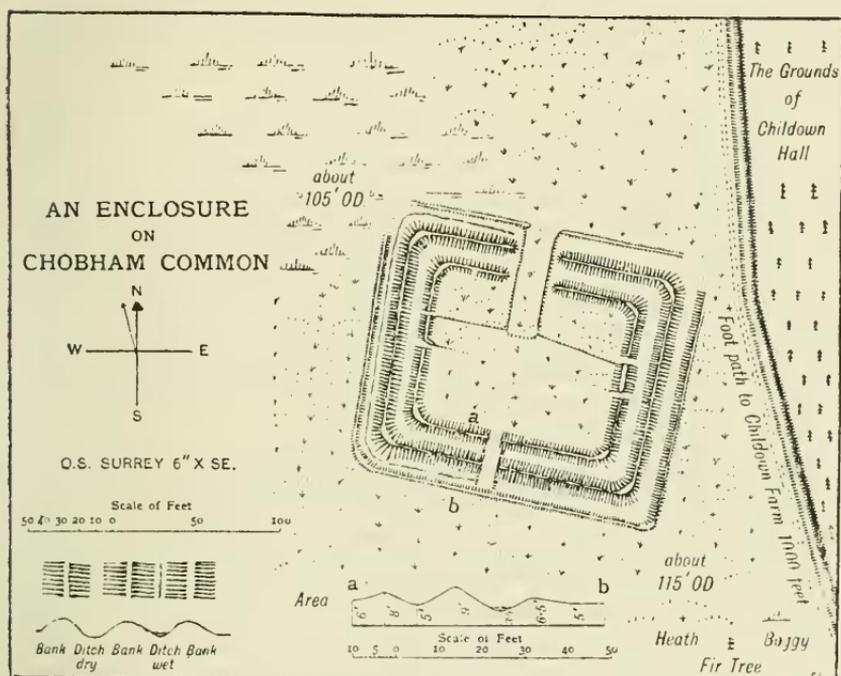
The enclosure is constructed on the Bagshot Sands, and all around to the west and north-west the ground is covered with the heaths and heather which form the characteristic feature of hundreds of acres of the wastes in this part of Surrey. Immediately outside the north and west banks, but especially round the north-west angle, the soil is wet; and the sundew growing between every clump of heath shows that it is permanently so. This wetness is almost certainly due to an underlying stratum of Bracklesham clay rising near the surface, for the outer ditch on the west, and its western half on the north and south sides, always contains water even in a dry summer. That this water-bearing stratum which runs under the enclosure has been reached in cutting the ditches is shown by the nature of the vegetation in them, which contrasts with the heather-clad banks and area, in being knee-deep in the luxuriant and water-loving purple molina-grass, and dotted about with tufts of the common rush.

The little enclosure is very neat and in good preservation. It is nearly rectangular; and there are three banks and two ditches. The corners of the banks are slightly rounded and higher than elsewhere, a condition that is often noticeable in a rectangular earthwork, as in digging out the ditch there is extra soil available for the corners of the banks. The inner bank measures 112 ft. on the north side, 100 ft. on the south, and 86 and 80 ft. on the east and west respectively. It encloses an area between one-third and one-quarter of an acre, above which it rises 2 ft. and falls 3 into a wide ditch, and its overall measurement is 13 ft.

The middle bank is larger and higher. It rises 4 ft. out of its inner ditch, and falls 5 into its outer; its overall measurement is 18 ft. and its best profile is to be seen on the west, where, possibly, the more tenacious nature of the soil has helped to preserve it. The outer bank, with an overall measurement of 11 ft., is very small; it rises  $2\frac{1}{2}$  to 3 ft. out of its ditch, and falls about a foot, and in some places less, on to the ground outside, which is level with the area on the south, above it on the east,

and below it on the west. To the north the outer bank is only just perceptible, and both its north-east and north-west corners have disappeared.

The entrance is in the middle of the north side, and consists of a causeway 16 ft. wide which passes across the ditches, through gaps 23 ft. wide in each of the ramparts, and ends abruptly 63 ft. from the line of the outer rampart, which is prolonged across it for 3 ft. on its western side. The causeway is very carefully cut; and it rises gradually so that its



sides just before its termination are about 2 ft. above the area on the west and 1 ft. on the east, the difference in height of the two sides being due to the general tilt of the whole earth-work from east to west.

In the middle of the inner bank on the east is a detached portion rather higher and broader than the rest, 18 ft. wide, from which runs a raised track, of the same width, towards the centre of the enclosure. It is very faintly marked, and has been mutilated by the uprooting of some seedling fir-trees during

the war. Its northern edge meets the angle of the entrance causeway, but its southern border dies away before it reaches the centre of the enclosure. There is a similar detached section of the middle of the inner western bank, but it is not as high or as broad as that on the east: it, too, is 18 ft. wide, and has a faint track of corresponding width running towards the centre, whose northern edge joins the angle of the entrance causeway while the southern is lost. Nearly in the middle of the south side both ditches are filled up, and the middle and inner banks, but not the outer, are levelled; so that a path 11 ft. wide passes over both ditches and two of the banks, but not over the outer one, which, though of slight profile, is untouched.

So far the work of the recorder has been easy, but it is quite otherwise when it comes to assigning a date or suggesting a use for the enclosure. The age of a bank can within certain wide limits be gauged by the amount of weathering and spreading it has undergone, provided the observer has a good local knowledge of the soil. A soft sandy soil weathers much, ditches fill up, and banks waste, and what was once a great rampart, looks small and insignificant, and only its width—*i.e.*, what is called its overall measurement, measured with a tape applied to its surface from one side to the other—betrays its former greatness. Chalk weathers less rapidly; and the short cropped turf that covers our Chalk downs gives the ramparts of earthworks that are cut in them a characteristic outline. On some soils ramparts hardly waste at all, and the great camp of Woodbury, constructed on the pebble beds of the New Red Sandstone north of Budleigh Salterton, stands out almost as it was built, with clean-cut ramparts and ditches sharp and well defined.

When a deep ditch is dug, and the earth is thrown up on one side to make a bank, the sides of the ditch disintegrate and soil from the bank falls into it and begins to fill it up. On the Bagshot Sands this happens fairly quickly, and after a time less debris falls and the bottom of the ditch becomes grass-grown. But under the influence of sun, rain, and frost, its sides, and the slopes of the bank, still continue to break down slowly, till finally they wear down to such an angle that nothing more falls off them; they assume an angle of rest, and become

covered with vegetation. Subsequent changes are more gradual: surface mould slowly accumulates on the bank and in the bottom of the ditch, and the bank itself consolidates and spreads. It is trampled by men and animals, and earthworms help the slow continual change. If the banks, as at Chobham, are covered with heather which is liable to be burnt by heath fires, then the surface sand is completely exposed again and fresh wasting occurs, so that the last stage of a really old earthwork on sandy soil is a widely spread bank of very low profile. How long it takes for all these changes to happen it is difficult to say, but Pitt Rivers opened the ditches of Wor Barrow on Handley Down some thirty years ago, measured them, and left them open for future observation.<sup>1</sup> It is clear from their present condition that it will take many more periods of thirty years before their banks have assumed their angle of rest and have become completely grass-grown. The banks of the Chobham enclosure are well weathered, but they do not look so venerable as the banks of a somewhat similar enclosure twelve miles away at Aldershot called Bat's Hogstye, and I am inclined to look on them as mediæval rather than prehistoric, but to suggest a use for them is rather more difficult.

Small, square, and rectangular enclosures occur all over the country, and on all soils; on open downs and in meadows, on moors and in forests, on high ground and on low. One with a single bank enclosing about one-third of an acre lies on a slope of Handley Hill, in Cranbourne Chase, and was thoroughly excavated by General Pitt Rivers.<sup>2</sup> He was not able to form a conclusive opinion about it, but he was inclined to consider it of early Roman date and thought that its use was pastoral. Others have been dated from the Bronze Age down to mediæval times and later; which is only another way of saying that at all times man has found a use for small rectangular enclosures.

It will help to limit the enquiry if we consider only those enclosures that are found on the gravels, sands, and clays of the Bagshot beds in Surrey and the New Forest, and include also the three that lie on Banstead Heath on the lower Tertiary

<sup>1</sup> *Excavations in Cranbourne Chase*, Lieut.-General Pitt Rivers, Vol. IV., p. 24.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

Gravels east of Walton-on-the-Hill.<sup>1</sup> These are all close together: one is enclosed by a single ditch between two banks, and the others are limited only by a single bank and ditch. They have single gap entrances, and enclose one-tenth, one-third, and seven-eighths of an acre respectively. They certainly served no warlike purpose, were probably pastoral, and may have had some connection with the large number of sheep that were once pastured in this part of Surrey; but they have never been excavated.

The Chobham enclosure is marked on the old Ordnance Survey map as a Bee Garden, and as such it is known to-day; but as an old cottager remarked to me, "It's a strange place to make for bees," and so it is. I do not yet know if any bee gardens still exist on the Common, but the enclosure is quite unlike the remains of those in the New Forest which were in use eighty years ago. These are quite small, and only cover an area of 16 ft. each way and are limited by clod-built banks.<sup>2</sup>

That the bee-garden theory is wrong is shown by the name being associated, both locally and on the Ordnance Survey map, with a prehistoric defensive earthwork of a well-known type which lies a mile away to the west of the Chobham enclosure in Albury Bottom.<sup>3</sup> But the name is quite old, and our member Miss Peele of Childown Hall tells me that the enclosure was once thought to be the parish bee garden, where the bees were kept that provided the tithe wax for the candles in Chertsey Abbey. There is just this amount of truth in the story that in 1300 the parish priest of Chobham, in consideration of certain concessions made by the abbey, had to render to the abbot six pounds of wax yearly;<sup>4</sup> and the knowledge of this in later days may possibly have suggested a use for a place that, though on a much larger scale, reminded people of the bee gardens with which they were acquainted. The bee-garden name is equally erroneously attached to a small rectangular earthwork on Holt Heath, about six miles west of Ringwood.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *V.C.H.*, Surrey, Vol. IV., p. 392.

<sup>2</sup> *Earthworks of the New Forest*, by Heywood Sumner, F.S.A., p. 128.

<sup>3</sup> *V.C.H.*, Surrey, Vol. IV., p. 394.

<sup>4</sup> *Surrey Record Society*, No. 5, pp. 63 and 64.

<sup>5</sup> "Ancient Earthworks in the Bournemouth District," by Heywood Sumner, F.S.A., in *Proceedings of the Bournemouth Natural Science Society*, Vol. XII.

Small rectangular enclosures with more than two banks are unusual, and the only other example known at present<sup>1</sup> is Bat's Hogstye, thirteen miles from Chobham in the Long Valley at Aldershot just over the Surrey border, which has four banks and three ditches, and encloses an area of half an acre.<sup>2</sup> It, too, may be pastoral, but it is older than the Chobham earthwork, and may well be earlier than the Domesday Survey, and belong to a period to which Mr. Heywood Sumner would approximately assign a little group of pastoral enclosures in the New Forest.<sup>3</sup> They are similar to the Chobham enclosure in size, but they have only one bank and ditch. They are found at Church Yard, Sloden Wood; Studley Castle; Church Place, Denny Wait; and Church Place, Ashhurst. Three of them have "Church" place-names, of which there are three more in the New Forest connected with earthworks, and the association is not uncommon; I have found it again this year in "Ruber Church," a small earthwork in Stowe Wood west of Kilkhampton in Cornwall.

The four earthworks described by Mr. Sumner are "similar in their size (about one-third of an acre), in their square shape, in the slight profile and precise alignment of their banks and ditches, and in their gap entrances. It is most unusual to find such exact similarity in earthworks, and there can be no doubt that they were all four made for the same purpose and during the same period." What animals used to be penned in them we do not know, as no relics were found in one Mr. Sumner excavated in Sloden Wood,<sup>4</sup> but they may have been used for ponies or cattle; though in discussing an even smaller example in Anses, Sumner hints at the possibility of pigs.<sup>5</sup> This is most suggestive, for in these days we are apt to minimize the importance of pigs in the past and forget their numbers. Even in the eighteenth century the vestry had to appoint a man at Weybridge to "keep the children in awe during Divine Service and the hogs out of the churchyard during the

<sup>1</sup> There is an earthwork 30 yards square at Kirkby Mallory in Leicestershire with three banks 17 ft. high and ditches 45 ft. across which is hardly comparable. See *Field Archæology as Illustrated by Hampshire*, by J. P. Williams-Freeman, M.D., p. 63.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 61 and 355.

<sup>3</sup> *Earthworks of the New Forest*, Sumner, p. 61 *et seq.*

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

same." They were profitable in many ways, and 'their chief food was the fallen mast of the beech and oak. Both these trees are found round the four New Forest earthworks, which, indeed, are situated in the woods, and beeches grow quite close to Bat's Hogstye; and both are found at Chobham. Bat's Hogstye is a curious name. We do not know who Bat was, but quite possibly he was a person or deity of some importance in the West Country, for his name is associated with Castles and Brooks, Coombes and Fords; he possesses a Corner and his Grave is known.<sup>1</sup> If Bat really is a personal name, it is not unlikely that it was associated with an old "Hogstye," or pig enclosure, long disused, by people who were acquainted with enclosures for pigs, but were struck by its unusual size and method of construction; somewhat in the same way as a rectangular stone enclosure on Bodmin Moor, recalling the foundations of a building, has been associated by the local inhabitants with the popular hero and called "King Arthur's Hall."<sup>2</sup>

If the enclosures at Chobham and Aldershot were ever used for herding swine, an extra number of banks is quite a reasonable addition in view of the activity of the pig; and the detached sections of the banks in the middle of the east and west side at Chobham could easily mark the sites of huts or styes with an approach up to them. There are, indeed, good grounds for associating pigs with Chobham, for in the Domesday Survey of Surrey<sup>3</sup> each manor in the county was *inter alia* assessed at the value of the swine it could produce. Most manors were valued at quite a small number, and only six exceeded Chobham, which was worth 130 hogs from its woods. Croydon headed the list with 200; Farnham, whose boundary is within a mile of Bat's Hogstye, was assessed at 150½; while the woods of Woking, the neighbouring manor, to Chobham yielded 133,

<sup>1</sup> Is it possible that some of the "Bat" place-names in the West Country may be derived from Badb, one of the Keltic war deities? Bat's Corner occurs near Farnham, and Bat's Grave at East Wood Hay. There is a Bat's Castle at Dunster, two Batcoombes in Somerset and one in Dorset, two Batworthys and a Bat's Brook in Devon, and a Batsford in Gloucester, and Badley is the name of a Manor in the Hundred of Crondall, the Hundred in which Bat's Hogstye is situated.

<sup>2</sup> *V.C.H.*, Cornwall, Vol. I., p. 393.

<sup>3</sup> *V.C.H.*, Surrey, Vol. I., p. 295 *et seq.*

and into them the Bishop Osberne had the right of sending 120 more from East Horsley.<sup>1</sup> Chobham, indeed, seems to have been famous for its pigs till quite recent times, for as late as the beginning of the last century a weekly pig auction was held every Sunday on the village green before Divine Service.<sup>2</sup>

It may be thought that a good deal has been written about a small and somewhat insignificant earthwork, but small rectangular earthworks are common in England; and in archaeology it is the common things that are important, because they were more used and tell us more about the customs of old times—far more, indeed, than the rare things which were only used occasionally or by a few people; and it is certainly worth while recording these earthworks, because by so doing we can classify them and note their points of resemblance and difference, and collect evidence that will be of considerable help to those who subsequently excavate them.

The enquiry as to the possibility of the Chobham enclosure having been used for pigs is, of course, inconclusive, but the occurrence of the only two small rectangular earthworks at present recorded with three and four banks respectively, within a few miles of each other, must be capable of some explanation. They were probably both pastoral enclosures, and the number of their banks is probably due to the kind of animal they were made to enfold, and their presence in what was undoubtedly the chief pig-breeding area of Surrey in the eleventh century is certainly significant.

<sup>1</sup> *V.C.H.*, Surrey, Vol. I., pp. 291 and 300.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. III., p. 414.